

A Guide to Discovery for the Children of Light

# The Rapture Question

An Unfiltered View

GERARD MAJELLA

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[theunfilteredgospel.com](http://theunfilteredgospel.com)



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## Dedication

*To the children of light; those faithful and enduring followers  
of Jesus Christ. It is they who've given up homes, loved ones,  
and even their very lives in order to dwell as God's people,  
in God's kingdom, under God's loving rule.*



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# Introduction

## The Challenge

Some years ago, a friend challenged me to look into the subject of the rapture. Since I already had a firm belief in Christ's return, to gather his chosen ones and bring them salvation, this didn't seem like too difficult an issue for me. Christ's return is a core part of the gospel which I proved for myself early in my Christian walk. His definition of rapture was a little more involved than what I had studied previously; it was more accurately described as the pre-tribulation rapture.

I didn't recall any of my previous studies touching on the timing of Christ's return, mostly on the certainty of that return. This challenge would be a good opportunity to learn something new. I just happened to be in the midst of studying end-time events when I accepted the challenge; confident that it would add to that study. I was not let down. Not only did it add to the topic of the rapture but several other key topics as well:

- The purpose for those called and chosen by God
- God's will for Israel and Gentile believers
- The relationship between the "Great tribulation", the "Day of our Lord", and the "Time of Jacob's Trouble"
- The role imminence plays in our Lord's return
- The depth of the unity designed into the body of Christ
- The need for believers to "prove all things"

It is the last topic that I would like to expand on first, since it is a key motivator for this Christian. Unfortunately, I have witnessed that this is not a key motivator in other Christians' lives. Some are willing to accept the word of men without taking the time to put the Spirit of God, the teacher of the will of God, to work in their lives and prove these things for themselves. Being a Christian gives one

valuable access to God, through Jesus Christ, that is essential if we are to “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.”

I therefore make the challenge to all who read this book – prove these things for yourself. Use this resource and any others as a guide, together with the Holy Spirit, to see and discover God’s will for you in this matter. Admittedly, the topic of the rapture and its timing is not an issue of salvation. However, depending on your current perspective, it is certainly a topic that can at some point in the future undermine your faith. My challenge to the reader is to be certain that your faith rests squarely on the teachings of Christ and not on the teachings of this or any other writer.

When I began studying the topic of the rapture, I was not predisposed to one outcome or another. On the surface I could see value in a pre-tribulation rapture of the church. As a starting point, my friend suggested the writings of minister and author J. Vernon McGee. Fortunately, I was able to find considerable material on this topic by McGee. However, I wasn’t content to simply read one man’s perspective on the subject. Some further digging revealed that McGee was familiar with the works of author and minister John F. Walvoord. Walvoord is the author of the book *The Rapture Question*. It became apparent to me that McGee’s writing closely mirrored that of Walvoord’s, in some cases using identical phrases. A little more research showed they were in fact contemporaries. Both graduated with degrees in theology at Dallas Theological Seminary. In fact, Walvoord was on the faculty staff during the time that McGee was attending. Now armed with two resources, I felt I was able to get a detailed look at this doctrine and could make a thorough study of the topic, the results of which follow.

After reading Walvoord’s book and McGee’s articles, I proceeded to identify the fundamental points on which their shared perspective regarding the pre-tribulation rapture rested. By focusing my studies on these claims first, I expected my confidence in their perspective and the related doctrine to grow. If these fundamental points

proved to be true, then proving the ideas built upon them would be easier. If however, these claims did not prove to be true, the rest of the doctrine could not stand.

These fundamental claims form the sections of this book and each will be broken down further into numerous chapters as needed and includes:

1. The church is not appointed to wrath and therefore cannot enter the “Great Day of His Wrath”
2. The Great Tribulation, a seven-year period, is the period of God’s wrath upon the world
3. There is a wide difference in time between the rapture and the revelation
4. The doctrine of imminence, when applied in context to our Lord’s return, requires a pre-tribulation rapture
5. The body and bride of Christ is in this dispensation only and is separate from the saints of previous dispensations and those that appear during the tribulation

## Challenging Ideas, Not One’s Faith

I must be clear in my motivation for writing this book. It is to present a different perspective which challenges those ideas and presuppositions that conflict with the overall plan, purpose and outcome of God’s reconciliatory relationship with mankind as outlined in scripture. The fact that I, or any author for that matter, have presuppositions and worldviews through which we see everything, scripture included, is an accepted reality. The distinction I will attempt to make in this book is to clearly define the presuppositions that are the basis for my conclusions.

That each chosen and faithful member of the body of Christ shares a unique and valuable role in God’s divine purpose is a reality that cannot be overlooked or set aside. We are all still human as we

– *work out our own salvation in fear and trembling*, and must therefore recognize our shared limitation. We all – *see through the glass, darkly*. It is in this context then that I extend consideration and respect to both J. Vernon McGee and John F. Walvoord. I will use their names at times to reference the ideas they hold, but my focus is on the ideas and not on the men personally. I know neither of them personally nor their works in the faith. I must, therefore, be willing to suspend judgment and trust that God is working in their lives to his desired ends. I extend the same consideration and respect to all chosen and faithful in the body of Christ. And I extend and repeat the same challenge to all who read this book – seek the Spirit of God and prove these things for yourself.

## The Authorship of the Fourth Gospel

Due to the dispute over the authorship of the Fourth Gospel, traditionally attributed to John, I will refer to this book as the Fourth Gospel. I have concluded on the side of such authors as J. Phillips, Edward Reaugh Smith, and Tobias Skinner who have shown conclusively John could not be the sole author and instead attribute primary authorship to Lazarus – the disciple whom Christ loved.

## CLAIM I

# The Church Is Not Appointed to Wrath

Both McGee and Walvoord contend that a key tenet of the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine is that the church is not appointed to wrath and therefore cannot enter into the wrath to be delivered upon the world during the “Great Day of the Lord’s Wrath”.

Let’s begin by putting the claim in the form of a question. An underlying theme supporting this claim is that the church is afforded reconciliation with God. We must look, then, not just at the scope of Christ’s message of reconciliation but who were its intended recipients. What were the benefits, if any, of that reconciliation and who were the benefactors?





# Chapter 1 - Is the Church Appointed to Wrath?

## Be Reconciled to God

We are first introduced to this concept of being freed from the wrath to come by John the Baptist.

Matthew 3:4-12 (ESV throughout)

*Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.*

*But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

*"I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."*

John the Baptist had a very important role paving the way for the

gospel our Lord was going to bring to the world. For the people in Jerusalem and Judea, the concept and necessity for the forgiveness of sin was real, vital, and essential to their belief system. Most would have been taught, in the context of the covenant with Israel, that sin had to be addressed, to be atoned for, if one was to be right with God. And what was one motivation for them in their desire to be right with God? To avoid his great wrath prophesied to come upon the unbeliever and the sinner.

Now John comes along and offers, through repentance and baptism, the forgiveness of sin necessary to all (Mark 1:4). This was a radical idea; that confession of sin and baptism in water could lead to reconciliation with God without the blood of bulls and goats. This was indeed a unique idea. John was the pivot point, although unknowingly, between the old covenant and the new. His teachings bridged the gap and enabled those who heard him to recognize and accept the gospel our Lord was about to breathe and live among these very same people. (Luke 1:13-17, 76-77; 3:1-21)

So it wasn't just sin and its forgiveness that motivated people to come and be baptized by John. It was also the opportunity to be right with God and avoid his wrath that was certain to come. John made it clear though that it didn't end with him – that another would follow. One who was greater and would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. One has to ask though, since this other baptism was with the Holy Spirit and fire, did that in any way nullify the baptism John was introducing? I think not.

On the surface, baptism is an outward sign of an inward commitment and desire; an act of faith. One that is as important for us to make and experience as it is to fulfill the purpose and meaning behind the baptism. It becomes clear that Christ's gospel didn't nullify John's baptism with water for the forgiveness of sins, but in fact expands on it. Baptism in the Holy Spirit takes the extra step and changes the sinner into a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:14-20; Romans 6)

John's baptism then, provides the preparatory step intended. Since his baptism was not in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, it appears to lack the spiritual component of baptism instituted by the early church. Yet Christ himself set the example when he was baptized by John. This not only served to validate John's work, but to establish his own place and role in the gospel of grace, mercy, and forgiveness of sin which he came to pour out on the people.

The next scripture of relevance to the subject of deliverance from wrath is Romans 5:9. But to garner a broader context of this passage, let's include verses 8 and 10.

Romans 5:8-10 (ESV unless noted)

*but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*

So the assurance and certainty is this; these are the prerequisites which lead us out of wrath and into Christ's everlasting life:

- Justified by faith and peace with God through Christ Jesus (Romans 5:1)
- Brought through death by Christ's death (Romans 5:8)
- Justified by Christ's blood (Romans 5:9)

We can look further in the book of Romans to see what are the fundamentals of that justification.

- The righteousness of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:22)
- For all who believe that he is the Son of God (Romans 3:22)
- Justified by God's gift of grace (Romans 3:24)
- Through the redemption that is in Christ (Romans 3:24)
- To be received by faith (trust) in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:25)

As surely as Christ has taken us through death by his death, he will also bring us into the fullness of his life (Romans 6) – having crucified the enmity that led us into God’s wrath. That enmity with God leads to wrath is clearly scriptural. See also Ephesians 5:3-6 and Colossians 3:5-17 as examples.

But it is deliverance from wrath that we seek, by the grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And this, in part, is our hope. The Thessalonians, in the power of the Holy Spirit, lived that hope by turning from idols to the living God.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

*For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

And again in chapter 5, the author contrasts those in darkness, destined for wrath, and those who are the children of light, destined to obtain salvation.

1 Thessalonians 5:8-10

*But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.*

And when will that wrath come upon the ungodly and sinners of the world? Is it not when the righteous judgment of God is revealed to the world?

2 Thessalonians 1:5-8

*This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering – since indeed God considers it just to*

*repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

As certain as the punishment of the wicked has been established and demonstrated by God so likewise will be his deliverance of the righteous.

2 Peter 2:5-9

*if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;*

*if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly;*

*and if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked . . .;*

*then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment,*

This is sufficient to verify our Lord's intent to deliver his chosen ones from God's impending wrath and to lead them to the promise of salvation for which they were called. The numerous scriptures on this topic in the book of Revelation will be reserved for the following discussion on God's Day of Wrath.

## The Recipients of Reconciliation

Before we leave this topic it's necessary to recognize the various nouns and pronouns used, within the context of the scriptures we've just reviewed, to refer to those whom Christ saves from wrath. You'll notice that not once do any of these scriptures use *ecclesia*<sup>1</sup> to

refer directly to the church<sup>2</sup>. This becomes important as we develop our viewpoint on the rapture topic. They are enumerated here and I encourage you to verify them in this, the English Standard Version, and other translations.

- *His wheat* (Matthew 3:12; Luke 3:17)
- *You . . . baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire* (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16)
- *All those . . . loved by God* (Romans 1:7)
- *All those . . . called to be saints* (Romans 1:7)
- *We . . . justified by faith* (Romans 5:1)
- *We . . . standing in grace* (Romans 5:2)
- *Us . . . who have God's love poured out into our hearts* (Romans 5:5)
- *Us . . . who've been given the Holy Spirit* (Romans 5:5)
- *Those justified by the blood of Christ* (Romans 5:9)
- *Those saved by Christ from God's wrath* (Romans 5:9)
- *Those who've now received reconciliation* (Romans 5:11)
- *Beloved children* (Ephesians 5:1)
- *You are light in the Lord; children of light* (Ephesians 5:8)
- *You who are circumcised by the circumcision in Christ* (Colossians 2:11)
- *You who were buried with him in baptism* (Colossians 2:12)
- *You who are also raised with him from the dead* (Colossians 2:12)
- *You who were dead in your trespasses* (Colossians 2:13)
- *Whom God has made alive together with him* (Colossians 2:13)
- *You who've been raised with Christ* (Colossians 3:1)
- *You who've died and your life is hidden with Christ in God* (Colossians 3:3)
- *You . . . being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator* (Colossians 3:10)
- *God's chosen ones* (Colossians 3:12)
- *Holy and beloved* (Colossians 3:12)
- *You are all children of light, children of the day* (1 Thessalonians 5:5)

## Summary and Conclusion

It is clear from the brief exposure to scripture thus far that a key purpose in God's redemptive work with mankind involves the offering of reconciliation, redemption, and salvation to eternal life – all through belief in Yeshua (Jesus the Christ) as the Son of God. Reconciliation restores the relationship with God, establishes peace, and removes the enmity (humanity's attitude of opposition to God) in which we previously dwelt. Redemption cleanses our lives and our conscience through the sacrificial body and blood of the Son of God, enabling us to dwell in God's presence by the power and gift of his indwelling Holy Spirit. This then leads to our salvation – being saved from the permanence of death, and brings us into the fullness of life in Christ at his appearing – eternal life.

It is likewise clear that by entering into belief in the Son of God we leave behind the condition, or state, of being under God's wrath. This exemption from wrath includes the Lord's Day of Wrath, which is brought upon the ungodly and sinners of the world when Christ returns. By entering into a relationship with God, through Christ his Son, we become his children of light and enter (by faith and promise) into Christ's eternal life.

The first presupposition in effect to this point – God is faithful and will fulfill in those called and chosen what he has already completed in Christ. Secondly, and equally important, God's wrath is motivated by his righteous judgment. Ultimately his correction and wrath are not for their destruction, but to break their pride and lead them to redemption in Christ our Lord. This is true for Israel and for the nations of the world.

## Notes

1. The Rapture Question – second edition, John F. Walvoord – Meaning of Ecclesia (pg 22-23)
2. When using the term *the church* I'm referring to Walvoord's fourth



definition of *ecclesia*. Due to the broad use of the term in our modern culture, I will use, as scripture does, various nouns. In the case of those who believe in Yeshua, the Christ, as the Son of God, I'll use the term *body of believers* or *body of Christ*.

## CLAIM II

# The Great Tribulation is God's Wrath upon the World

Another common perspective shared by McGee and Walvoord is that they both equate the Great Day of God's wrath with that of the Great Tribulation – thinking they are one in the same. In the revised and enlarged edition of *The Rapture Question*, Walvoord makes some direct assertions from both the Old and New Testaments on the subject.

1. The first involves expanding the scope of the tribulation period such that it includes the Great Day of God's Wrath.
2. The second asserts that “not one reference is found to the church, either by the name itself or by any other title peculiar to believers of this present age” when reviewing the fifteen chapters of Revelation which he attributes to the tribulation.
3. Another says the Time of Jacob's Trouble, as it applies to Israel, spans the Great Tribulation and the period of God's wrath.

Since the arguments for each of these are quite involved, I've dedicated a chapter to each. As I make reference to either McGee's or Walvoord's writings, I'll include excerpts of them so that the reader can better understand the context. While I encourage the reader to read these books or articles on their own to get the author's perspective directly, it's not a prerequisite for this book.



# Chapter 2 - Is There a Distinction Between God's Wrath and the Great Tribulation?

Since we've already established the scriptural basis for Christ saving many from God's wrath, we should see that determining when God's wrath begins has an enormous impact on the timing of Christ's return. Walvoord and McGee's approach is to assign God's wrath to the time of the Great Tribulation, thereby assigning the time when Christ saves the faithful from wrath to just before the Great Tribulation begins. With this underlying perspective clarified, we must determine its validity. Let's begin with Walvoord's first assertion regarding the scope of the Great Tribulation<sup>1</sup>.

"The major Scripture portion in the New Testament on the Tribulation is the Book of Revelation, chapters 4-18. Fifteen chapters of this book describe in the most graphic language possible the great catastrophic time of trouble that is ahead for the world. Any reasonable literal interpretation of this Scripture will sustain the point of view that the events herein described have never been fulfilled and comprise the awful period of human history still ahead. . . ."

"The Book of Revelation reveals the same major elements found in other passages on the Tribulation in the Old and New Testaments. The period is revealed to deal with Israel primarily and is specifically "the time of Jacob's trouble" (KJV). Attention is also given in these chapters to the climactic character of the times of the Gentiles. In chapter 19 the ultimate downfall of all Gentile power is traced to the personal advent of Christ to reign over the world."

These two paragraphs are a summation of the claim that the events revealed in chapters 4 through 18 of Revelation focus completely on the Tribulation. We'll review much of the detail which preceded this summation as we continue in this chapter. Let's start in Revelation 19 where, in agreement with Walvoord, we witness some events prior to the advent of Christ's reign over the world.

Notice in Revelation 19:11-16, which follows the brief description of the marriage supper of the Lamb, a distinguished rider is described;

- One who sat on a white horse – called faithful and true
- In righteousness he judges
- In righteousness he makes war
- He is called by the name – the Word of God
- His armies follow him, arrayed in fine linen, pure and bright, also on white horses
- He is armed with the sword of his mouth
- To strike down the nations
- He will rule them with a rod of iron
- He will execute the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God
- He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords

It's important to note that Christ alone is given the power and authority to execute God's wrath and judgment at his return. With him are his chosen saints, his bride – arrayed in fine linen, pure and white, and they join him in this quest. But he is at the lead – as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, to rule God's kingdom and execute his judgment.

There is no timing given for the placement of these events in chapter 19. It's a mistake to assume the chapters of Revelation correspond to a chronological order of events. There are however, the events themselves from which one can derive at least a sequence. For example;

- The bride is attending the wedding feast with her betrothed – our Lord Yeshua (vs 6-10).
- This means Christ has already met (raptured) her in the air as

his angels gather his chosen ones from the four corners of the world – the dead resurrected to eternal life, and the living transformed to spirit (Revelation 6:12-17; Matthew 24:29-31; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

- After these events is when the armies of our Lord battle the nations of the world gathered together under the leadership of the beast and the false prophet (vs 17-21).

It is clear then, prior to Christ's return to earth to execute God's final wrath and establish his kingdom upon the earth, the beast and the false prophet are reigning over the nations of the world. Where can we go in scripture to see the conditions of the world prior to our Lord's return? It just so happens that Christ's own disciples asked about the events preceding his coming and the end of the age. Yeshua describes for them, recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, events that will span from their time until the end of the age. Let's look briefly at the topical structure of Christ's discourse in all three gospels.

Questions (Matthew 24:1-3; Mark 13:1-4; Luke 21:5-7):  When will these things be (the temple destroyed)? What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?			
Beginning of birth pains	Abomination and destruction of Temple and Jerusalem	Great tribulation, great distress	Appearing of the Son of Man

## Beginning of Birth Pains

It's interesting to note that Christ's response to their praise of the temple provoked in them thoughts of the end of the world. He was in fact simply describing an event that was only decades in the future – the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. What's even more stunning is Christ's answer to their question regarding *the sign of your coming and of the end of the age*? He enumerates

for them events which will occur in their day and leading up to his return. The initial events are what Christ refers to as the *beginning of birth pains*. We'll compare what's recorded in each of the three gospels.

Matthew 24:4-13	Mark 13:5-13	Luke 21:8-19
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• False Christs come to deceive</li><li>• War</li><li>• Famine</li><li>• Earthquakes</li><li>• Martyrdom</li><li>• Increased lawlessness</li><li>• Decreased love</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• False Christs come to deceive</li><li>• War</li><li>• Famine</li><li>• Earthquakes</li><li>• Martyrdom</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• False Christs come to deceive</li><li>• War and tumults</li><li>• Famine and pestilence</li><li>• Great earthquakes</li><li>• Martyrdom</li></ul>

Notice that Christ makes it clear these events will continue until the end. That is the duration of time these birth pains are to be endured (Matthew, Mark). Then just prior to the coming of the end – *this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations* (Matthew 24:14). It would be presumptuous to assume this is referring to the testimony of the New Testament church. Scripture provides other possibilities (Revelation 11:3-12; 8:13; 14:6-8; 18:1-8).

## Abomination and Destruction of Temple and Jerusalem

The abomination and destruction of the temple and Jerusalem is spoken of next. Each of the authors describe this event as though it's something those in the surrounding region of Judea could see approaching. It's a direct answer to their question regarding every stone of the temple being thrown down and was fulfilled when the temple and Jerusalem were destroyed in their lifetime.

Compare the three, Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Matthew 24:15-20	Mark 13:14-18	Luke 21:20-24
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abomination of desolation standing in the holy place</li> <li>• Those in Judea flee to the mountains</li> <li>• Don't turn back</li> <li>• Woe to those pregnant or nursing</li> <li>• Pray your flight isn't in winter or on a Sabbath</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abomination of desolation standing where he ought not</li> <li>• Those in Judea flee to the mountains</li> <li>• Don't turn back</li> <li>• Woe to those pregnant or nursing</li> <li>• Pray your flight isn't in winter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jerusalem's desolation is near when you see it surrounded by armies</li> <li>• Those in Judea flee to the mountains</li> <li>• Those in the city depart</li> <li>• Don't enter the city</li> <li>• These are days of vengeance</li> <li>• To fulfill all that is written</li> <li>• Woe to those pregnant or nursing</li> </ul>

Notice that Luke mentions the prophetic relationship of this event occurring in Jerusalem; *for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written* (vs 22). He's referring to the prophecies against the southern nation of Judah located at Jerusalem. More on that in a moment. Luke's description of this event doesn't end there. It continues.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great distress upon this earth</li> <li>• Wrath against this people</li> <li>• They will fall by the sword</li> <li>• They are led captive among all the nations</li> <li>• Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by Gentiles</li> </ul>
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More importantly, Luke indicates the duration for all this distress; from the time the temple is destroyed until the *times of the Gentiles are fulfilled* (vs 24). That results in *distress for this people* continuing



to a period that extends up to the point at which we started our discussion in Revelation 19. The clarification for this comes from the connection between the *times of the Gentiles* and the *mystery of God*.

### *The Mystery of God . . .*

is an expression of the will of God in Christ Jesus; to extend grace and the unity of faith to Gentile and Jew alike; to expand the promised inheritance once given to Israel, in order to manifest in them the new creation.

This connection is partly reflected in Paul's discourse on the contrasting purpose and relationship between Israel and the Gentiles (Romans 11). He also touches on the future promise for Israel.

#### Romans 11:25-32 (Part of the mystery of God)

- Israel's stumbling was for the benefit of the Gentiles – that they might hear and receive the calling of God (vs 11-24)
- Until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in
- This is completed when the mystery of God is fulfilled (Revelation 10:7)
- They (Israel, including the Jews) are made enemies of the Gospel for your sake
- Yet all Israel will be saved
- The Deliverer will take away their sin (future tense)
- You, who are now faithful to Christ, were once disobedient – but received mercy from God
- They too, (Israel, including the Jews) being disobedient now – will also receive mercy

- Verse 32 – *For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.*

## Great Tribulation and Great Distress

Let's continue with Luke's unique account since he doesn't use the term *tribulation*. He also directly connects the *great distress upon the earth* and *wrath against this people* with the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. Notice that in Luke's account, though it's rendered to Gentiles, it focuses on the Jews in Jerusalem and surrounding Judea; *this people*. The distress mentioned (vs 23) is of a compulsive nature and the Greek transliteration (*anagke*) is not used once in the New Testament for tribulation, though they have similar meaning. As noted earlier, the time span for the distress experienced by the Jews begins with the abomination and desolation (destruction) of Jerusalem, which occurred in their lifetime, and ends just before Christ descends to earth to intervene on Jerusalem's behalf.

The challenge for modern readers, whether of the pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, or post-tribulation perspective, is the reliance on viewing prophetic events described in the New Testament only through the lens of Daniel's Seventy-Weeks prophecy. If we remove that lens and let the natural reading and prophetic nature of the Seventy-Weeks prophecy do its job, it successfully describes and fulfills the destruction of the city and the sanctuary of God.<sup>2</sup>

It makes sense that the temple of the old covenant be removed (made obsolete) in A.D. 70, so that the correction upon Judah may continue (Fourth Gospel 4:1-26; Hebrews 8). This too was prophesied in Daniel 11<sup>3</sup>, and was in fact what Christ was referring to in Matthew 24 when he spoke of the abomination of desolation. For the remaining Jews of the first century, this meant that as it was in the time of Daniel's captivity, a time of correction, so it will be again for Judah and Jerusalem from the time of their destruction

and dispersal until the time of the Gentiles is completed. We'll delve into this more fully in the next section.

Next, our two other authors introduce what is referred to as *great tribulation* and *much tribulation*. When we compare the account of Matthew 24 with Mark 13, we can see the similarities in how the tribulation is described for the faithful elect (chosen). This has two possible applications; those faithful among the remnant of Israel (Romans 11:1-6) and those called, chosen, and faithful of the Gentiles (Romans 11:25).

Matthew 24:21-25	Mark 13:19-23
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This tribulation is worse than any before</li><li>• It threatens all humanity</li><li>• It will be cut short for the sake of Christ's elect (those remaining alive)</li><li>• He's giving us advance warning</li><li>• Don't be deceived</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This tribulation is worse than any before</li><li>• It threatens all humanity</li><li>• It will be cut short for the sake of Christ's elect (those remaining alive)</li><li>• He's giving us advance warning</li><li>• Don't be deceived</li></ul>

Some key questions should arise from the events described here;

1. Who is it that seeks to destroy all mankind – even God's chosen ones, those who serve him in spirit and in truth?
2. Who is it that will cut short this time of great tribulation and in doing so save mankind and God's elect?

Continuing in Matthew, Christ proceeds to sternly warn his disciples, and those that believe through their word and testimony, how many will attempt to deceive them concerning his return. Only those looking to the Messiah and having their hope in his appearing can be deceived about it. Those hoping for the Messiah consist of two distinct, yet similar, groups of people; those called and faithful among the remnant of Israel, and those called, chosen, and faithful of the Gentiles. The rest of the world is not looking for Christ's return – they don't care for the work that God and his Christ are

doing. They are content to follow the lie and the source of it – the great deceiver.

Matthew 24:23-28

- Yet some will come, false christs and false prophets, and say, “Look, here is the Christ!”
- Do not believe it
- They will perform great signs and wonders, intending to deceive and to lead many astray
- Do not believe it
- Christ tells those that will hear in advance – do not believe it
- The coming of the Son of Man will not be a hidden event
- Like lightning shooting across the sky from east to west, the brightness of his appearing will be visible to all the world

For the faithful called by God, of which these disciples were among the first, there remains a time when the tribulation and birth pains will intensify. So great will be the deception and destruction of those days that it threatens the extinction of the faithful. This Christ will not allow. According to the Father’s purpose, both the dead in Christ and those faithful alive at his appearing are intended to glorify him to the world (Fourth Gospel 17:20-26; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 10-12).

## Appearing of the Son of Man

Finally, Christ gets to who and what it is that halts this time of tribulation and answers the second question – Who is it that will cut short this time? Christ does, by his return! Looking again to the gospel accounts. Each adds to the overall view of what takes place preceding Christ’s appearance when the time of the Great Tribulation is brought to a close.

Again, let’s compare the three.

Matthew 24:29-30	Mark 13:24-26	Luke 21:25-28
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The powers of the heavens are shaken</li> <li>• The sun is darkened</li> <li>• The moon will not give its light</li> <li>• And the stars will disappear from the heavens</li> <li>• Then will appear in the sky the sign of the Son of Man</li> <li>• He is coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and glory</li> <li>• And all the nations of the world will see and know that the Day of the Lord has come</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sun is darkened</li> <li>• The moon will not give its light</li> <li>• And the stars will fall from the heavens</li> <li>• The powers of the heavens are shaken</li> <li>• Then will appear in the sky the Son of Man</li> <li>• He is coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and glory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signs in the sun, moon and stars</li> <li>• Roaring seas and waves on earth</li> <li>• Powers of the heavens are shaken</li> <li>• Then will appear in the sky the Son of Man</li> <li>• He is coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and glory</li> </ul>

Awesome! Awesome is our God! How wonderful will Christ's appearing in the sky be for those who love his return! I suggest it will be joy indescribable; the fulfillment of their entire lives.

We must, however, come back to earth for a moment and back to present reality. Before we continue there are some clear observations to be made which are vital to the topic of distinguishing the Great Tribulation from the execution of God's wrath:

- Christ's return *cuts short* this time of Great Tribulation. This means he is not the direct cause of the events preceding his appearance.
- By cutting short the time he saves his chosen ones – in the sense of bringing salvation to them (vs 31)
- He also saves the rest of mankind from destruction

There is a second place we can go to see the clearly defined events that precede our Lord's return; the sixth chapter of the book of

Revelation. Before we can delve into an overview of this chapter, we must first have the frame of mind of the author, John. Certainly he understood the sovereignty and divinity of the Son of God, and the love God demonstrated in Christ. We know with certainty that he was shown these things. As the recipient of the Revelation of Yeshua for the things that are, have been, and will be, John saw and experienced the work that Christ was completing. Accordingly then, we must look at the entire book of Revelation through the same lens.

#### Revelation 1:1-3

- Christ is revealing that which was previously hidden
- God is the source of this revelation, given to Christ to reveal to his servants
- Just as Christ chose those whom the Father called to be his servants
- He also continues to fulfill the will and the work of the Father

Christ himself outlines the fundamentals of that purpose and work in Luke 4.

#### Luke 4:16-19, 42-44

- He is the anointed one, full of the Holy Spirit
- The purpose for that anointing?
- To proclaim good news to the poor
- To proclaim liberty to the captives
- Restore sight to the blind
- To set at liberty those who are oppressed
- To proclaim a time of the Lord's favor
- An underlying purpose for which he was sent was to preach the good news of the kingdom of God

Continuing in Revelation 1, we can see the characteristics of supremacy Christ uses to describe himself to John.

#### Revelation 1:17-18

- I am the first and the last and the living one

- I died and behold I am alive forevermore
- I have the keys of Death and Hades

Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, is illustrating for John the basis for his authority when he reveals these hidden things to him. It's not just about his positional authority as the Son of God. It's as much about his relational authority as the Lamb of God – having fulfilled the will of God; the redemption of humanity.

As the first and the last, he's repeating verse 8 – *I am the alpha and the Omega*. As one with the Father he is, was, and is to come. The Fourth Gospel further details the nature of Christ's oneness with the Father.

#### Fourth Gospel 1:1-4

- The Word was in the beginning with God and was God
- All things were made through him
- Christ is the living one; in him was life and the life was the light of men

And what is the nature of that life characteristic in Christ? It's based on a resurrected life – *I died and behold I am alive forevermore*. Chapters throughout this gospel expound the life found in Christ Jesus. It is eternal life; what we call immortality. (Fourth Gospel 3:15-16, 36; 4:13-15; 5:21, 24, 39-40; 6:27, 33, 41-51, 62-63; 10:28; 11:25-26; 17:1-3)

In Revelation 5, John is shown a scene in heaven. There at the throne of God, Christ alone is undeniably characterized as having supremacy over completing God's will in these final days.

- The reference to the slain Lamb harkens back to the redemptive work Christ has already completed through his death and resurrection
- This completed work is clearly a key characteristic of his worthiness to fulfill this role
- Two other characteristics are also given:

- The Lion of the tribe of Judah
- The Root of David

Christ alone has the authority to finish what he began. He alone possesses the keys to Death and Hades. By his death and resurrection he has overcome the deception of Satan and the condemnation of sin which is death. He is the source of life for all mankind but especially for those who are called to hear and believe. Through Christ, Yahweh has poured out his grace, mercy, and love – his light of truth, on a world in darkness. (Fourth Gospel 1:9-13, 14-18; Colossians 1:27; Revelation 1:4-8)

The challenge in Revelation is that much of it is written using symbolic language which hides the clear understanding. The result is similar to Christ's use of parables to hide the meaning of his testimony. To most it wasn't given for them to understand the meaning. Yet to his disciples it was intended that they should understand, so Christ would explain the meaning to them. In the case of the book of *Revelation of Yeshua to John* we look to other parts of scripture for understanding. The Bible interprets itself. To understand Revelation chapter 6 we can look to Matthew chapter 24.

Here's how they compare.

Revelation 6	Matthew 24
The white horse (6:2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rider with authority on earth</li> <li>• To conquer</li> <li>• With a bow</li> </ul>	False Christs and deception (24:4-5,11) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let no man deceive you</li> <li>• Many will come in my name</li> </ul>
The red horse (6:4) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rider with a great sword to battle with</li> <li>• People should kill one another</li> <li>• Take away peace</li> </ul>	(24:7) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revolutions</li> <li>• Nation against nation</li> <li>• Wars and rumors of war</li> </ul>



The black horse (6:5) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scarcity of food</li> <li>• High cost of food</li> </ul>	(24:7) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plagues</li> <li>• Famines</li> </ul>
These always follow war – as the areas destroyed can no longer grow, harvest, and process food for the remaining survivors.	
The pale (green) horse (6:8) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• death</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• death</li> </ul>
This is a key element of war. Those not killed in the fighting die afterward due to famines and sickness (plagues)	
The fifth seal (6:9, 11) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fellow servants killed</li> </ul>	(24:9-10) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Martyrdom</li> </ul>
The sixth seal (6:12-17) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sun, moon, stars are darkened</li> <li>• The wrath of the Lamb has come</li> </ul>	(24:29-31) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sun, moon, stars darkened</li> <li>• Sign of the Son of Man appears in the sky</li> </ul>

Now it must be understood that many attribute the rider on the white horse in the first seal to Christ himself. What we must not overlook is the relationship of the first four seals with the fifth seal. It is the first four horsemen that bring about the fifth seal; the death and martyrdom of those slain for the sake of the word of God and for the testimony of the Lamb (vs 9). Are we to conclude then that this first horseman on a white horse is the Christ who brings about war, pestilence and hunger, death and martyrdom of his own? And as we've established earlier – is it not Christ, whose return *cuts short* the time of tribulation, who saves his chosen ones and remaining mankind? The parallel with Matthew 24 clarifies that this first rider is certainly a counterfeit.

Another concern is that Revelation 6:1 clearly names the Lamb as the one who opens each of these seals. The assumption then is because he opens the seals leading to these events, he is the direct cause of these events. That line of thinking only occurs when we fail to look through the lens of the author, John. God's sovereignty establishes the timing of these events (Matthew 24:36), and Christ's

supremacy ensures the outcome according to God's will (Revelation 5). Even Satan is constrained by God's will and timing.

Note also that in Matthew 24, after Christ outlines the events that parallel the first five seals of Revelation 6, he clarifies that some will claim he (Christ) is on the scene – *he is here*, or *he is there*, yet he commands them – *do not believe it*. This, as much as any other evidence, points to the realization that Christ has not returned yet, and he has no part in these tribulation events which precede his arrival. These events are the result of those who are deceiving.

There appears then, from what we've seen so far in Revelation 6, 19, and Matthew 24, a clear distinction between what Christ refers to as *great tribulation* and his return to earth to execute God's wrath (Day of the Lord). One marker Christ mentions, which precedes his appearing, is the heavenly signs:

- Powers of the heavens are shaken
- The sun is darkened
- The moon will not give its light
- And the stars will disappear from the heavens
- Then will appear in the sky the sign of the Son of Man

If we look elsewhere in scripture we will consistently see a correlation between these heavenly signs and the Day of the Lord. We can continue with Isaiah who also describes what occurs surrounding the Day of the Lord.

Isaiah 13:5-13

- Warriors are coming with their Lord to destroy the whole land
- The Day of the Lord is at hand
- Men's hearts will melt with fear and terror, in pain like a woman about to give birth
- The Day of the Lord comes without remedy, with wrath and fierce anger
- To make the earth desolate and destroy sinners
- The stars of heaven will not give their light, neither the sun nor

the moon

- The world will be punished for its evil, and the world's pride will be broken
- The heavens will be shaken and the earth will experience a great earthquake

Joel 2:31 also shows us the marker for the great and terrible Day of the Lord.

- The sun is darkened, and the moon turns into blood before the great and terrible Day of our Lord.

Moving forward to the New Testament era, Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit and giving his first gospel sermon, also quotes Joel (Acts 2:16-21). This again leads us to the answer to our second question above – who is it that will cut short this time of Great Tribulation and in doing so save mankind and God's elect? Christ's return cuts short this time of Great Tribulation. This means he is not the direct cause of the events described in Revelation 6. So in agreement with Isaiah and Joel, Matthew 24 and Revelation 6 show that preceding Christ's return are the heavenly signs and great earthquake. The people of earth are terrified by this because they realize, just like those in Noah's day when the waters began to collect and the flood came, that the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord's wrath has come.

This marker, the events of the sixth seal, is the same marker we've seen repeatedly that signifies the return of our Lord and the Day of the Lord's wrath has come. This clarifies that the great time of suffering, which has no equal, precedes the return of our Lord. That means it also precedes the Day of the Lord. This leads us back to our first question – who is it that seeks to destroy all mankind including God's chosen ones?

If these are not the same event, then one must ask who is responsible for this Great Tribulation that is so vast it threatens the existence of all human life such that Yeshua, the Christ, must intervene to stop it? Paul, in his second letter to the Thessalonians

provides an overview of what he calls *the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him* (2 Thessalonians 2:1). This *being gathered together to him* is essentially what's referred to as the *rapture*.

It's important to connect some of the details provided by Paul with those we've already seen in Matthew 24 and Revelation 19.

Matthew 24	2 Thessalonians 2
4-5, 11-12, 23-25) <i>False christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray . . .</i>	3) <i>Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come (our Lord's return – vs 1), unless the rebellion comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed . . .</i>
21-22) <i>For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. . . . no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.</i>	4) <i>who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.</i>
Revelation 19	2 Thessalonians 2
19-20) <i>And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet . . . These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.</i>	8) <i>And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.</i>

It's clear that this *lawless man* of 2 Thessalonians 2 leads a rebellion which precedes the coming of our Lord. He is then revealed to be the son of destruction – the servant of Satan. What the book of Revelation refers to as the *beast power*. This servant of Satan exalts himself above every so-called god as though he was a god. He shall be destroyed by our Lord with the Spirit of his mouth when he returns. Before Christ's return though, this counterfeit takes his *seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God*. Those looking through the lens of the Seventy-Weeks prophecy will

naturally conclude the reference to the temple is a rebuilt temple of the Jews. There is a simpler and more suitable view that fits clearly within the context of all that is transpiring here:

- Christ warns repeatedly about the deceit to occur prior to his appearing; those proclaiming to be Christ, the Son of God, but aren't
- An antichrist appears on the scene with the intent to deceive
- He has power to deceive with signs and wonders
- His motives for deception are clear; *proclaiming himself to be God*
- At some point, the source of his powers are revealed to come directly from Satan

Let's step back a moment and review what we know about Christ's first appearing:

- Rarely did Christ verbally proclaim his position in the Godhead
- He proclaimed it by fulfilling prophecy and by his deeds
- He demonstrated authority over the physical realm and the spiritual realm
- According to God's will and purpose, he allowed them to destroy *the temple of God* which God raised three days later (Matthew 26:61; Mark 14:58; Fourth Gospel 2:9)
- This significant act draws the faithful, called by God, to his Son, by the tens of millions

Now as the time for the return of our blessed hope approaches, one bent on deception and destruction steps onto the scene intent on stealing the glory promised to the Son by making his appearance before Christ.

- He will claim to be God in the flesh
- The spirit of Satan will deceive and possess men (Revelation 16:13-14) – whom God created to be the temple of his Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18)
- He seeks to become the object of worship for the world – all knees will bend to worship him

- Only those whose names are not written in the book of life will worship him (Revelation 13:8; 17:8)
- There are some who won't bend their knee to this false-Christ

Matthew 24, Revelation 19, and 2 Thessalonians 2 align with each other and provide the answer to who it is that causes the martyrdom of the saints and the near extinction of mankind. It also answers who it is that is in power prior to Christ's return; the man of lawlessness, the servant of Satan. This servant of Satan leads a deceptive rebellion against all that is of God. Once his true motives are revealed to be aligned with Satan, he can intensify his move against the Jews at Jerusalem and all who trust in God or have the testimony of Christ. As those in Jerusalem flee they are pursued by the serpent – bent on their destruction. During a period of around 3-1/2 years those fleeing are protected from the wrath of the serpent – the time Christ referred to as *great tribulation*. (Revelation 12:7-17)

For further reading, study the following to begin seeing the full scope of the Great Tribulation, God's correction of Israel, and his plan for their restoration. These will be discussed later in chapter 3.

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- |                    |                     |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| • Deuteronomy 4    | • 2 Thessalonians 2 |
| • Zechariah 13, 14 | • Joel 1, 2, 3      |
| • Jeremiah 30      | • Revelation 12, 13 |
- 

## Will the Body of Believers Pass Through the Great Tribulation?

Scripture makes it clear that we will. To answer the call of God has never been an easy thing. Those who grow in the likeness of Christ die to the world daily. Though many have lived in faith and have died for his name's sake – many others have not been tested to that point, yet all seek the same prize – the salvation of our mortal souls.

Recall that a key motivator for our Lord's return is to cut short the time of suffering of his chosen ones (Matthew 24:22). And one of the first things he does after his appearing is to gather his chosen ones to himself – those alive at his return and those who've already passed (Matthew 24:31). Christ warned his followers of the oppression that might befall them in the world. That they would be hated and killed for his name's sake (Matthew 24:9). But he who has patience to the end will be saved (Matthew 24:13, Mark 13:13). This is a consistent message to all his followers. (Fourth Gospel 16:33, Romans 5:3-9).

Revelation also warns that some in the church will be disciplined during this time while others will not be burdened further (Revelation 2:19-24). This is a time that will test the faith of all believers. For Christ warns of the false christs of this period who will deceive many, and even possibly, his chosen ones (Matthew 24:11, 24). So do we stand alone at this time? Not at all. We are protected by Christ (Jude 1:1-2). We are called to be the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:14-17) and to stand fast. He will grant us to be at peace at his appearing, while wrath and destruction await any who oppress us (2 Thessalonians 1:4-10).

And what does our patience gain for us? To be able to stand and receive our reward (our salvation) and, together with Christ, conquer those who oppress (Revelation 11:18, 17:14).

## Summary and Conclusion

It should begin to be clear that the period referred to as the Great Tribulation could be called the time of Satan's wrath. His attempts to destroy Israel, God's people, and wipe out those loyal to God will grow to world-wide scope. It will be a time unlike any in history. He knows his time is short, and he'll continue to do all he can to undermine God's plan for humanity.

We can conclude from the scriptural evidence that there is a clear distinction between the period of the Great Tribulation, ushered in by the servant of Satan, and the arrival and revealing of Christ to halt the destruction Satan causes. It is at Christ's arrival that he will execute God's wrath upon an unbelieving world and establish his reign over all nations. Yet by God's hand and Christ's work, both periods of wrath will bear fruit; Satan's wrath will prove the faithfulness of God's called and chosen, and God's wrath will correct the nations and lead many who've been deceived into repentance and trust in Christ. We'll look at this in more detail in chapter eleven.

From the scriptural references in Matthew 24, 2 Thessalonians 2, and Revelation 12, we're able to identify two key milestones in this period;

1. The revealing of the Son of Perdition. From this point forward he leads a rebellion against the people of God and all those who have the testimony of Christ.
2. Just prior to the revealing of Christ in the sky, there will be the heavenly signs that result in the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars. This indicates a major shift in authority and brings relief to the world and salvation to Christ's faithful.

There are several presuppositions I hold that impact the way I view the subject as it's revealed in scripture. I'll enumerate them here:

1. The bible can interpret and is a witness to itself. The Holy Spirit is a key means to understanding the connectedness and larger context of scripture.
2. The book of the Revelation of Yeshua to John is not arranged in chronological chapters; chapters that are ordered numerically and follow a sequentially ordered set of events.
3. The book of Revelation provides detail on the age following the establishment of Christ's body of believers until the time of the



end (last days), through the Great Tribulation, into the period of God's wrath, followed by the 1000-year reign of Christ on earth, and up to the end of the age; with the new heavens and new earth, along with the arrival of the throne of God brought down to earth.

4. There is no "gap theory" necessary to explain the end time prophecy of Daniel. The Seventy Weeks prophecy speaks to the time of Christ<sup>4</sup>.
5. The rider on the white horse of Revelation 6 is not Christ. Scripture provides sufficient evidence to recognize this as a deceiver seeking to appear as though he was Christ, yet he is in fact the servant of Satan.

## Notes

1. The Rapture Question - second edition, John F. Walvoord - latter portion of the New Testament Doctrine of the Tribulation (pg 45-46)
2. Desolation of the Temple and Messianic Enthronement in Daniel 11:36-12:3, Jason Thomas Perry, Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 54.3 (September 2011, pages 487,494-499)
3. Desolation of the Temple and Messianic Enthronement in Daniel 11:36-12:3, Jason Thomas Perry, Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 54.3 (September 2011, pages 501-526)
4. Desolation of the Temple and Messianic Enthronement in Daniel 11:36-12:3, Jason Thomas Perry, Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 54.3 (September 2011, pages 485-526)

# Chapter 3 - Do the Fifteen Chapters of Revelation Mention the Church?

Another assertion Walvoord makes is that “not one reference is found to the church, either by the name itself or by any other title peculiar to believers of this present age” when reviewing Revelation chapters 4-18<sup>1</sup>. Recall also that he was attributing all fifteen of these chapters to the Great Tribulation. Yet we’ve already shown that the Great Tribulation is distinct from the period of God’s wrath (Day of the Lord). As we review these nouns and titles, we’ll also need to distinguish which chapters of Revelation relate to which of these two periods. Tribulation events will occur before the Lord’s appearing, and God’s wrath will occur after it. As we review each chapter, I’ll give a brief overview as a context to the scriptures referenced. Keep in mind that the events of these chapters do not necessarily occur in the order in which they are recorded by John.

Revelation	General Context	Tribulation	Wrath
4	We’re introduced to the throne of God and of Christ, along with the thrones of the 24 elders and the four living creatures. We’re reminded of God’s sovereignty as creator of all things seen and unseen.	No	No
5	Christ, the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, the Lamb of God. He alone has authority to open and execute the will of God represented by the scroll. This authority covers both periods.	Yes	Yes
5:8 <sup>(A)</sup>	... and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the <u>saints</u> . (This connects through both)	Yes	Yes

5:9-10 <sup>(A)</sup>	... and by your blood you <u>ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth.</u> (This connects through both)	Yes	Yes
6	The Lamb opened the first six seals and discloses the events occurring prior to and at his appearing.	Yes	No
6:9-11	... then <u>they</u> were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer until the number of <u>their fellow servants and their brothers</u> (brethren) should be complete, <u>who were to be killed as they themselves had been.</u>	Yes	No
7	Answers the question raised in chapter 6 – who is able to stand when Christ appears in the heavens to execute God's wrath (Matthew 24:29-31)? Two groups are protected from God's wrath; 144,000 of the scattered tribes of Israel are sealed, and a great multitude who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. This sealing and protection occurs before God's wrath begins.	After Christ's appearance but before his wrath is administered	
7:3-8	"Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: ...		
7:9-17	... And he said to me, "These are the <u>ones</u> coming out of the great tribulation. <u>They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.</u> ..."		
8	The seventh seal and the first four of seven trumpets, representing the first part of God's wrath, begins.	No	Yes
9	The fifth and sixth trumpets of God's wrath continues. These are the first two woes.	No	Yes
10	The seven thunders and the mystery of God fulfilled	No	Yes

11	The two witnesses begin their prophesying and their testimony at some time during the tribulation but are killed by the beast power rising out of the bottomless pit. They are then resurrected by God. This occurs just prior to the seventh trumpet, the third woe.	Yes	Yes
11:17-18 <sup>(B)</sup>	<i>... and for rewarding <u>your servants</u>, <u>the prophets and saints</u>, and <u>those who fear your name</u> both small and great</i>	Yes	No
12	The dragon (Satan) and his angels are cast down to the earth. He exhibits great wrath because his time is short. He pursues those who gave birth to the Son of God (Israel) and those who have the testimony of Christ.	Yes	No
12:10	<i>... <u>our brethren</u> (brothers and sisters)</i>	Yes	No
12:11	<i>... <u>they</u> conquered him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of <u>their</u> testimony, ... for <u>they</u> loved not their lives even unto death.</i> (Martyrs)	Yes	No
12:17	<i>... <u>those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.</u></i>	Yes	No
13	The Beast, the servant of Satan, comes to power along with the second beast (False Prophet).	Yes	No
13:7	<i>... make war on <u>the saints</u> and to conquer them.</i>	Yes	No
13:10	<i>... a call for the endurance and faith of <u>the saints</u>.</i>	Yes	No
14	The Lamb stands on the earth at Mount Zion with his 144,000 redeemed from Israel.	No	Yes
14:3 <sup>(C)</sup>	<i>... the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.</i>	No	Yes

14:4 <sup>(C)</sup>	... <u>they</u> follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as <u>firstfruits</u> for God and the Lamb, ...	No	Yes
14:12	... a call for the endurance of the <u>saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.</u>	No	Yes
15	The seven angels with the seven plagues. This begins the third woe.	No	Yes
15:2	... those who had conquered the beast ... standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands.	No	Yes
16	The seven angels pour out seven plagues upon the earth.	No	Yes
17	Babylon the Great Prostitute is consumed by the beast power who is then consumed by the Lamb	Yes	Yes
17:6	... drunk with the blood of <u>the saints</u> , the blood of <u>the martyrs of Jesus.</u>	Yes	Yes
17:14 <sup>(D)</sup>	... <u>those with him</u> (the Lamb) are <u>called and chosen and faithful.</u>	No	Yes
18	The fall of Babylon. Babylon is judged by God.	Yes	Yes
18:4	Come out of her <u>my people</u> , ...	Yes	Yes
18:20	... O heaven, and <u>you saints and apostles and prophets</u> , for God has given judgment for you against her!	Yes	Yes
18:24	And in her was found the blood of <u>the prophets and saints</u> , and all who have been slain on the earth.	Yes	Yes
<p>A) The events surrounding the saints, their prayers, and their redemption connects across both periods.</p> <p>B) The events spoken of in Revelation 11:17-18 are looking backward in time (past tense).</p> <p>C) Though not considered part of the church, according to Walvoord's definition, these are God's faithful remnant from Israel, sealed and protected through God's wrath and ultimately redeemed from the earth.</p> <p>D) This is speaking of the point at which Christ will have already returned and has redeemed his called, chosen, and faithful. The war where the Lamb conquers the beast is detailed in Revelation 19.</p>			

It's clear to this reader that the many nouns and titles referred to in the passages above are certainly descriptive of the body of believers. That a couple of references refer to a faithful remnant of Israel's many tribes is not overlooked. This will be addressed in detail in a later section.

It's worth noting that these nouns and titles are not altogether different from those enumerated at the end of chapter one (The Recipients of Reconciliation). There we concluded, as did Walvoord and McGee, that God's wrath was not to fall on those described in the scriptural references cited. Recall that these references did not include the noun *ecclesia*. Why is it that these other nouns and titles are acceptable in answering that question, yet Walvoord finds them unacceptable when answering the current question? The answer lies in the framework, or presuppositions, Walvoord and McGee are using to interpret Scripture. That framework misses the contradictions it produces. Let's look at several other oversights;

1. By attempting to minimize the value of the elect (chosen) in Matthew 24:22,31, the larger context of Matthew 24 and its correlation to Revelation 6 is lost.
2. The claim that the elect of Matthew 24 does not conclusively represent the body of Christ which is to be raptured away prior to the tribulation.
3. The full context of 2 Thessalonians 2 is also missed.

## The Larger Context of Matthew 24

It is clear that the framework being used by Walvoord and McGee is blind to the obvious contradictions it produces. On the one hand it ignores the simple language of scripture for those called and chosen in Christ – his elect, yet on the other hand it embraces another – sons of light.

“As in the Old Testament, the Tribulation is seen as the forerunner of the second coming of Christ. According to Christ’s own teaching in Matthew 24:29-30, the Second Advent will “immediately” follow the tribulation.”

“Like all other passages on the Tribulation, there is no reference in this section of Matthew to the church. While the term “elect” is found in Matthew 24:22, 31, no mention is made of the church or any other term that would identify the believers of that period as belonging to the present dispensation.”<sup>2</sup>

Here Walvoord cites Christ’s own teaching in regard to the occurrence of the tribulation prior to his appearing and arrival, yet he fails to see the distinction between the two periods, as we’ve already shown, and Christ’s role in them. He goes on to exclude the term “elect” as applying to the body of believers, because he chooses to rely on dispensational thinking to override the clear meaning of the passage. This becomes even more evident by his statements in the following paragraph on 1 Thessalonians 5.

“Further revelation is given on the subject of the Great Tribulation under the terminology of the “day of the Lord” in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. The period is described as one in which sudden destruction will come upon those who walk in darkness whereas the “sons of light” are informed that “God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:9).”<sup>3</sup>

Because “sons of light” leads to those not destined for wrath, it becomes an acceptable term for the church, whereas “the elect” in Matthew 24:22, 31 isn’t acceptable because it doesn’t fit their expectations. By using the dispensational framework as a means to interpret Scripture, “the elect” can’t refer to the body of believers without conflicting with a pre-tribulation rapture.

Although we’ve clearly shown the distinction between what

Walvoord refers to here as “the Great Tribulation under the terminology of the ‘day of the Lord’”, it’s worth noting the constant contradictions of the framework he’s using as exemplified in 1 Thessalonians 5:9.

*For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake [alive] or asleep [dead] we might live with him.*

The salvation Paul is referring to in this verse is the very same salvation he referred to previously in chapter four; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

*For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep [died]. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.*

Paul even goes so far as to describe the circumstances by which we receive that salvation – the appearing of our Lord in the sky as described in Matthew 24:30-31. And clearly that appearing occurs after the tribulation – as Walvoord himself admitted. He fails to recognize the fact that the dead in Christ are raised first, before those alive are transformed and raptured away. He places the rapture before the tribulation and the resurrection of the faithful dead after it.

There are, however, numerous other observations within the context of Matthew 24 that should not be overlooked:

- At the time Christ delivers this insight, it appears there are only two groups of people to whom he could be addressing;
  - Israel; the tribe of Judah (Jews) and Benjamin, from which



his disciples were called, and those of the remaining tribes of Israel scattered among the Gentile nations which took them captive.

- The rest of the Gentile world
- There is also a third group whom Paul refers to in Romans 9 and 11 as a faithful remnant, God's elect or chosen, in Israel. More on this later.
- The church (as defined by Walvoord) hasn't been formed yet
- The span of time Christ is describing begins with the lives of his own disciples and continues until his appearing later to establish his kingdom on earth. It will include;
  - Those who respond to his gospel in Israel
  - The current faithful remnant of Israel
  - Those Gentiles who will also be called and chosen as his faithful servants
  - The fulfillment of all the work God has chosen Christ to do
  - This includes the fulfillment of the covenant promise to Abraham
- The scope of events includes the first six seals opened by the Lamb in Revelation 6
- There is a period referred to as the beginning of birth pains which precedes the end
- The end comes only after a global proclamation of the gospel

When Christ begins describing the events surrounding his coming and the end of the age, he immediately focuses on those who come in his name to deceive many and lead them astray. This deception comes first and continues right up until the heavenly signs and his appearing (vs 26-27). He also warns that only he *who endures to the end* will see it through to his glorious return (vs 13-14).

This is followed by wars and rumors of wars; nation against nation and kingdom against kingdom. These will continue from the time in which he is speaking forward until the end, but it doesn't represent the end. Famine and disease will then follow where the wars have occurred. Earthquakes and other natural disasters will also occur,

but it doesn't represent the end. That requires a divine proclamation of the undiluted gospel of Jesus Christ just prior to his appearing (vs 14).

Up to this point in time, the mystery of God has not been revealed or manifested; the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ as a means of salvation for the faithful. That critical event, although not mentioned directly in Matthew 24, is certain to occur during this same span of time. Why warn his disciples about deception if it doesn't apply to them and to those faithful whom they will minister to over that same period? Who else but those putting their faith in Christ would he warn against being deceived regarding his appearance? Those faithful elect (the chosen body of believers) are the only ones at risk of being deceived. Israel as a whole and the rest of the unbelieving Gentiles are not at risk for being deceived about Christ and his return.

The meaning and the warning, then, is for the body of believers – of which the disciples were among the first to be called at that time. Christ used the events relating to Israel and the temple, not because Israel was the only focus of the Great Tribulation, but because the events themselves are integral to his plan and purpose for all mankind – even though most of them might not recognize or appreciate it.

## **Do the Elect of Matthew 24 Conclusively Represent the Body of Christ?**

There is one condition under which Walvoord is willing to concede the possibility that the elect of Matthew 24:22,31 refers to a gathering of the church at the second advent of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

“It is possible, however, to harmonize this passage with pretribulationism even if, for the sake of argument, the word

elect be taken in its widest and most inclusive connotation of all saints of all ages.”

He goes on to say why he’s willing to concede the possibility.

“A number of considerations make this event quite different from the rapture of the church. The fact is that the church is not mentioned at all in this passage by any distinctive title such as the word church or the term body of Christ or any other term peculiarly a reference to the church. It is not claimed that this passage proves pretribulationism, but it is fair to assert that it does not offer any evidence whatever against it.”

He then goes on to define this distinction between the rapture and the second advent of Christ.

“The truth is that there will be a gathering of the church, the body of Christ, at the translation, before the tribulation. There will also be a gathering after the Tribulation which will be more inclusive. Matthew says nothing about a translation, and the idea of translation is foreign to any passage dealing with the coming of Christ to establish His kingdom. There will be no translation then, though there will be a resurrection of the righteous dead. Matthew 24:31 says nothing about the resurrection either. It should be clear that Matthew’s revelation deals with the gathering of the elect as an event subsequent to all that has gone before.”

Walvoord’s first two paragraphs are similar in that they revolve around the insufficiency of the word *elect* to properly identify the body of Christ. The inclusivity of the term *elect* and its reach across time to the saints of all ages requires a deeper dive into Matthew 24.

The third paragraph clarifies his distinction regarding the pre-tribulation rapture and the second advent of Christ. In doing so he creates two serious conflicts. The first is regarding the translation

of the faithful and the resurrection of the dead in Christ. He puts the gathering of the church at the translation before the tribulation and the resurrection of the righteous dead later at the coming of Christ to establish his kingdom. This is clearly in opposition to scripture which states plainly that the dead in Christ will rise first, then those who are alive and remain will be caught up (raptured) with them into the sky (1 Corinthians 15:51-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-16). The second conflict deals with the timing between the pre-tribulation rapture and the second advent of Christ. Section 3 of this book will delve more deeply into this part of his claim.

Let's continue by broadening the context of Matthew 24 even farther. We're well aware of the reference to the *elect* in Matthew 24:22, 31, but let's notice other relevant terms for the body of Christ in the last paragraph of the chapter. Here in Matthew 24:45-46, Christ is using a parable to convey to his disciples where their focus needs to be during these turbulent times preceding his arrival.

*Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.*

Certainly there can be little question as to the use of the word *faithful* in this context and to whom it refers. In the event that someone would question it, let's look at a relevant passage where these two (elect and faithful) are used together to refer to the bride described in Revelation 19, those who are arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, and accompany the Lord of Lords and King of Kings as he descends to do battle with the beast power and the nations aligned with him. This is the very context of Revelation 17:9-14. The ten kings have aligned their armies with the beast power to first destroy the Great Prostitute, then to make war on the Lamb. It is no surprise that the Lamb will conquer them. Note though who is with the Lamb;

*and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.*

I doubt that Walvoord would have any problem accepting this use of *chosen* and *faithful*, since they clearly represent the raptured and transformed body of Christ. The Greek word, rendered *chosen* here, is the same as the *elect* in Matthew 24. These adjectives are used throughout the New Testament to refer to the body of Christ. They form the framework from which we can understand the work that God is doing for us and in us. Let's look at each of them.

## Who are called?

Let's return to scripture to determine who the called refer to. The specific adjective we're referring to in the Greek is *klétos*, and it's worth looking at the noun form *klésis* also. Each occurs multiple times in the New Testament.

Strong's Concordance: [2822] called, invited, summoned by God to an office or to salvation.

Helps Word-Studies: [2822] literally, "called"; ("divinely called") focuses on God's general call

Matthew 20:16 – *Even so the last shall be first, and the first last; for many are called, but few are chosen.*

Matthew 22:14 – *For many are called, and few are chosen.*

Romans 1:1 – *Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,*

Romans 1:6-7 – *including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ; to all those in Rome, who are beloved by God, and called to be saints: . . .*

Romans 8:28 – *We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*

1 Corinthians 1:1-2 – Paul, called by the will of God . . . , to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . .

1 Corinthians 1:23-24 – but we preach Christ crucified, . . . but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

2 Timothy 1:8-11 – Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher,

Jude 1:1 – Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ;

Here again it's clear that Kletos is used as an adjective to describe the church of believers much like Eklektos is, in some cases being used in the very same verse. Another thing that cannot be overlooked is that, according to Helps Word Studies, the Greek *ekklésia* [1577] (ecclesia) which is translated as *the church* throughout the New Testament, has at its root *ek* [1537] “out from and to” and *kaléō* [2564] “to call” – people called out from the world and to God.

## Who are the chosen?

Next, we'll look at who the elect/chosen of Matthew 24 & Mark 13 are. Again, we'll look at the Greek adjective *eklektos* used in those scriptures and its use in the new testament.

Strong's Concordance: [1588] chosen, elect, choice, select  
Helps Word-Studies: [1588] selected (chosen from, out of), especially as a deeply personal choice

Matthew 20:16 – *Even so the last shall be first, and the first last; for many are called, but few are chosen.*

Matthew 22:14 – *For many are called, and few are chosen.*

Matthew 24:22 – *If those days hadn't been shortened, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, those days will be shortened. (NIV)*

Matthew 24:24 – *For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.*

Matthew 24:31 – *And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

Mark 13:20 – *If the Lord had not shortened those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect whom he has chosen [1586], he has shortened those days. (NIV)*

[1586] eklegó (verb) – to select; I pick out for myself, choose, elect

Mark 13:27 – *And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.*

Luke 23:35 – The people stood looking on and even the leaders of the synagogue mocked him saying, he saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ, the chosen one of God.

Romans 8:33 – Who shall bring any charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who justifies.

Romans 16:13 – Greet Rufus, chosen in our Lord, and his mother who is also a mother to me.

Colossians 3:12 – Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

1 Timothy 5:21 – In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.

2 Timothy 2:10 – Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Titus 1:1 – Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness,

1 Peter 1:1-2 – Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect . . ., according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

1 Peter 2:4-5 – As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.



1 Peter 2:9-10 – But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Aside from those few verses that use Eklektos for other nouns, like our Lord and angels, is there any doubt who the other scriptures are referring to? One could answer this clearly just from 1 Peter 2. It's fitting that those who believe in him who is approved are likewise approved (chosen) and part of the body of believers – the church.

It's worth looking at a few examples of the verb form of the elect; *eklegó* [1586]

Fourth Gospel 15:15-16,19 – No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.  
... but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 – For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God,

*righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”*

*Ephesians 1:3-5 – Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,*

*1 Thessalonians 1:2-10 – We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. . . . how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

*2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 – But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

I especially like 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5, 11-12. Here Paul describes what it means to be chosen without once using the word. He shows that to be chosen is to be made worthy of God's calling. Why is this so important? Look at verse 10 and 12 – *so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him.*

There is another important concept of election that Walvoord misses which Paul describes in Romans 11:1-7; that we Gentiles are

not alone in our election through faith, for there remains a remnant in Israel called and chosen by grace. They obtained through faith what Israel sought and did not attain. Not all in Israel stumbled, though the majority of them did. We'll build on this further in a later section.

## Who are the faithful?

The testaments, both old and new, are full of teaching in various forms on the value of being loyal to God and trustworthy – what we call faithful. Here we'll primarily look at the Greek word *pistos*, an adjective, to see who it is that are described as such. I'll comment on each example and in a few verses also reference the noun form *pistis* [4102] when it is used.

Strong's Concordance: [4103] trustworthy, faithful, believing  
Helps Word-Studies: [4103] faithful; typically, of believing the faith God imparts

Matthew 25:23 – *His master said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.*

In the parable of the talents, the master invites those who are faithful servants into his joy. They applied their belief in ways that produced growth, represented by the talents. They received praise from their master – *well done*, and greater responsibility. He that succumbed to fear did not grow. What he had was taken away and he was cast out of the master's presence.

Fourth Gospel 20:24-29 (NIV) – *Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless (apistos [571]) any longer. Believe!"*

Thomas is limiting his trust in what God is doing to only what he can

see. In rejecting what the other disciples proclaimed – *we have seen the Lord*, he also rejects what Christ himself taught them – *destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again*. We are called to trust what God and Christ are doing and what they have promised to do for us.

Acts 16:13-15 – *And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.” And she prevailed upon us.*

Those like Lydia, faithful to the Lord, have their heart opened to hear his word. These are believers and worshippers of God.

1 Corinthians 1:4-9 – *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

God shows that he too is trustworthy, who calls you into fellowship with his son, Yeshua, to;

- Sustain you until the end
- Keep you guiltless
- Not lacking in any gift of character by grace
- Enriching your speech of him
- Enriching your knowledge of him
- Trust God.

2 Corinthians 6:14-16 – *Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does*

*a believer share with an unbeliever (apisto [571])? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; . . .*

Here the contrast between opposing fellowships is drawn; what portion does a believer (the faithful) share with an unbeliever (not faithful). Paul goes on to exclaim that the faithful are the temple of the living God.

*Galatians 3:7-9 – Know therefore that they that are of faith (pistis [4102]), the same are sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith (pistis [4102]), preached the gospel beforehand unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all the nations be blessed. So then they that are of faith (pistis [4102]) are blessed with the faithful Abraham.*

The gospel, which New Testament Christians claim so exclusively, isn't exclusive. Its foundation is faith and has continued since Abraham, the father of the faithful (Romans 10:16-21). The inclusion of the Gentiles is additive, not exclusive as Walvoord suggests (Joel 2:30-32; Romans 11).

*1 Timothy 4:10 – For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, specially of them that believe.*

*1 Peter 1:20-21 – He (the Christ) was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith (pistis [4102]) and hope are in God.*

This Christ and Messiah was manifested for all who believe and trust in God. These are God's holy people – faithful followers of Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:1) called saints and faithful brethren in Christ

(Colossians 1:2). Even during tribulation and trouble they are called to remain faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10).

Clearly the process of being called, chosen, and faithful represents the work that God and Christ are completing in this body of believers;

- Called – to hear the word of God and the gospel of Christ
- Chosen – beloved by God, precious and sanctified, appointed to salvation, not deceived
- Faithful – trustworthy, loyalty, and steadfast to the end

## The Full Context of 2 Thessalonians 2

When we look at the focus of 2 Thessalonians 2, we see that it reinforces the same contrast shown in Matthew 24. The contrast is between faithful believers who are warned not to be deceived and those unbelievers who are deceived and seek to deceive others. Let's look at the context of the chapter from the author's point of view.

- The brethren (vs 1) are certainly the audience to whom Paul warns and comforts.
  - Note the lack of any reference to *ecclesia* in the chapter or the book.
- The topic is the timing of the coming of our Lord and our being gathered together with him (vs 2).
  - Note the author's intent for speaking on the subject is to comfort their fear and anxiety since they have been deceived into thinking it has already come.
- Be not deceived regarding the coming of our Lord (vs 3)
  - A rebellion comes first
  - The man of lawlessness is revealed as the servant of Satan (vs 9-10), the son of destruction
  - He's a deceiver, deceiving the world, those who are perishing (vs 10)
  - How? With power, false signs, and false wonders. With

wicked deception.

- He exalts himself against every god or object of worship
  - This constitutes the nature of the rebellion – against every so-called god, including the One True God.
- He goes so far as to violate the temple of God by possessing that temple and proclaiming himself to be God. He also sets up an image of himself to be worshipped (Revelation 13).
- He's called the son of destruction (vs 3)
  - He seeks to destroy the people of God (Jews) (Daniel 12:5-7)
  - And any who keep the testimony of Christ (Revelation 13:5-8)
  - He himself will be destroyed by the power of Christ at his return (Revelation 19:11-15, 20-21)
- Who is it he deceives?
  - Those who are perishing (vs 10) (See also Revelation 13:8)
  - Because they prefer the lie over the truth of Christ (vs 10-12)

The temple reference here doesn't require a literal, physical temple be built. As the deceiver, come to lead astray those who might follow Christ, he takes on the appearance of Christ – god in the flesh. Except the god who possesses these servants is quite literally the devil himself (Revelation 16:13-14).

There is much debate over the rebellion mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Some would translate it as “a falling away” or apostasy of the church, while others see it as a rebellion. Walvoord goes so far as to cite an unconventional and unacceptable viewpoint as further evidence of the pre-tribulation rapture:<sup>5</sup>

“Another evidence that the church will be delivered before the Tribulation overtakes the earth is cited by E. Schuyler English in his somewhat novel interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2:3. . . . The expression “the rebellion” is the translation for the Greek word *apostasia*. It is normally considered a reference to doctrinal apostasy. English

pointed out that the word is derived from the verb *aphistemi*, used fifteen times in the New Testament with only three of the references relating to religious departure. In eleven of the instances the word *depart* is a good translation. . . . He therefore suggested the possibility of rendering 2 Thessalonians 2:3 to the effect that the departure must “come first,” i.e., the rapture of the church must occur before the man of sin is revealed. If this translation be admitted, it would constitute an explicit statement that the rapture of the church occurs before the Tribulation.”

By looking at the context of the scripture and the subject of the surrounding sentences, it seems evident that the context more closely matches that of a rebellion against God – and by extension, those who believe in and trust in God. It’s clear that the “Man of Sin” is referring to the beast power. The clear description of his anti-God attitude would be the catalyst to a global anti-God movement – resulting in families being split, betrayal, hatred because of differing beliefs, and the shift in power that the beast will control. In the context there is also a clear connection between *the rebellion* and *the man of lawlessness*.

Even if we were to accept English’s interpretation of the word as departure, it wouldn’t hold that it’s referring to the rapture of the church. Since the larger context is contrasting the deception wrought by *the man of lawlessness* and truth, it’s not unreasonable to view the departure as one from the truth and into the lie. This same lie is the focus of verse 10-12, which is upon those who don’t love the truth and are perishing. This is hardly a descriptor of the body of believers, the faithful. Certainly the opportunity to be deceived exists for the faithful, and this Christ warned them about (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21).

Since Paul’s entire motive is to comfort the Thessalonians regarding *the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him*, he has the perfect opportunity to focus on this departure



to which Walvoord hinges his hopes. However, that's not what the author does. Instead, the author focuses on the source of *the rebellion, the man of lawlessness*, and continues to elaborate on the impact this *servant of Satan* will have on the world around him. When the details surrounding this *son of destruction* are given (vs 8-10), it clarifies the intent of the man and the power behind him; deception and destruction. Deception for those who are perishing (the world of unbelievers) and destruction for those who align themselves with God (vs 4, Matthew 24, Revelation 6, 12, 13). Although this will certainly test some in the church, I don't see in the context that the church is the central focus or source of it.

Paul himself refers to the nature of this affliction to come upon believers prior to Christ's appearing in the previous chapter.

## 2 Thessalonians 1:5-8

- Those who suffer affliction for the Kingdom of God are granted relief
- At his appearing he brings salvation and vengeance
  - Salvation for those who faithfully seek the Kingdom of God
  - Vengeance upon those who afflict those seeking the Kingdom of God.
  - Vengeance upon those who don't know God or recognize the gospel of our Lord

Here Walvoord forms what appears to be an underlying supposition for his stance on the pre-tribulation rapture. It is not one of his better arguments, and it is based on a viewpoint that is entirely outside the context. His viewpoint that 2 Thessalonians 2 supports the idea of the removal of the church prior to the revealing of the son of destruction is in complete opposition to the context of the entire letter.

If we continue looking at the remainder of 2 Thessalonians 2, we'll see some additional insights. Verse 15 especially deals with how the Thessalonians are to conduct themselves.

## 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

- God chose them as the firstfruits to be saved. A question worth asking is – if they are among the only ones to be saved, why call them the firstfruits?
- They were called through the gospel Paul delivered to obtain the glory of the Lord
- As a result, they're asked to stand firm and hold to what they were taught

## Summary and Conclusion

We're clearly shown that scripture, on its own, contradicts the dispensational framework Walvoord is using to interpret scripture. The chapters of Revelation 4-18 refer to not just the time of tribulation, but also to the wrath of God, executed by his Son at his appearing. It's also clear that although the word *ecclesia* is not used in these chapters this doesn't mean the church of this age is not included in a larger context. The use of numerous adjectives and nouns to refer to the faithful body of believers is well established throughout New Testament scripture.

We've shown also that the called, chosen, and faithful, who accompany the King of Kings and Lord of Lords out of heaven, are the same body of believers he gathers to himself at his appearing. They consist of the resurrected dead in Christ together with those who are alive at his return. Recall also that the dead in Christ are resurrected first. Then and only then can any remnant of the living church be transformed and translated to join the others redeemed from the earth. This argument alone seriously contradicts the conclusions Walvoord has arrived at using the dispensational framework.

Perhaps one reason Walvoord doesn't see the church of this age spoken of exclusively (in regard to this time period) is because the original authors didn't consider themselves as exclusively unique,

though called and chosen in Christ. He even recognizes this possibility when he states –

“It is possible, however, to harmonize this passage with pretribulationism even if, for the sake of argument, the word *elect* be taken in its widest and most inclusive connotation of all saints of all ages.”

I submit, and scripture supports, that the word *elect* is in fact meant in the widest and most inclusive connotation of all saints of all ages. This *unity in Christ* is a fundamental teaching throughout scripture and can't be easily displaced. Unfortunately, it also shows clearly that it doesn't harmonize with the dispensational view of these events. What it does show is that the faithful are rewarded as promised, according to Christ's example, at his appearing. That appearing occurs after the Great Tribulation, a time of Satan's wrath; a time of deception and destruction for those loyal to God. Yet God will intervene and send his Son to gather his called, chosen, and faithful servants to himself. At that time Christ will then execute God's judgment upon a deceived world. More on that in the next section.

The importance of keeping scripture in its own context, as defined by their authors, should be evident. Using the dispensational framework as a means of scriptural interpretation has failed to serve those who adhere to it in this case. The inspired authors of scripture provide a rich and varied view of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and their understanding of it. Many of the presuppositions held by these authors are expressed in their texts or elsewhere in scripture. It is from this perspective that we can better understand God's purpose and the work he is completing in Christ Jesus.

Two relevant presuppositions the author of the Fourth Gospel holds and that we've already touched on;

- God will exercise his sovereignty to accomplish his will – the fulfillment of his work to reconcile mankind to himself (Fourth

Gospel 1:9-13)

- The divinity and supremacy of the Son of God – the creator and finisher of all things. He alone is given authority to judge in righteousness according to the will of God (Fourth Gospel 1:1-5; Psalm 96:10-13; Isaiah 11:1-5; Acts 17:30-31; Romans 2:5-11; Revelation 19:11-16)

A couple presuppositions I add to these are;

- There are faithful believers in God from Abraham up until the time when death and the grave are cast into the Lake of Fire. (Romans 9, 10, 11; Fourth Gospel 3:16-21, 31-36)
- The election of God is not limited to Gentiles in this age only. (Galatians 3)

## Notes

1. The Rapture Question - second edition, John F. Walvoord - New Testament Doctrine of the Tribulation (pg 46, p2)
2. The Rapture Question - second edition, John F. Walvoord - New Testament Doctrine of the Tribulation (pg 45, p1-2)
3. The Rapture Question - second edition, John F. Walvoord - New Testament Doctrine of the Tribulation (pg 45, p3)
4. The Rapture Question - second edition, John F. Walvoord - The Nature of the Tribulation (pg 60-62)
5. The Rapture Question - second edition, John F. Walvoord - The Nature of the Tribulation (pg 67-68)

# Chapter 4 - Does the Time of Jacob's Trouble Span the Great Tribulation and God's Wrath?

The third and final assertion by Walvoord in this section is that the Time of Jacob's Trouble, as it applies to Israel<sup>1</sup>, spans both the Great Tribulation and the period of God's wrath. Let's begin where he begins in Deuteronomy, chapter four.<sup>2</sup>

“One of the first references to the Tribulation is found in Deuteronomy 4:29-30: “But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the Lord your God and obey him.” This first reference to the Tribulation brings out the special relationship of this period to Israel. It predicts that in the tribulation struggle some in Israel will be turned to the Lord and will listen to His voice. The obvious purpose of this spiritual awakening is one of preparation of Israel for the coming millennial kingdom.”

Here Walvoord clearly overstates his case in Deuteronomy 4 that “the Tribulation brings out the special relationship of this period to Israel.” I've made the same mistake myself. When we broaden the scriptural reference slightly, we can get a better picture of its context.

Deuteronomy 4:25-31 (ESV)

*When you father children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a carved*

*image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, so as to provoke him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed. And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you. And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. But from there you will seek the Lord your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the Lord your God and obey his voice. For the Lord your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.*

The NASB translation renders verse 30 punctuated differently as – *When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the Lord your God and listen to His voice.*

The distress or tribulation referenced here is not unique to the Great Tribulation as Walvoord asserts. Note the impact cited prior to verse 30 that comes as a result of their idolatry:

- Soon utterly perish from the land given them
- They will not live long in it but be utterly destroyed
- They will be scattered among the surrounding nations
- They will be left few in number

All of these examples of punishment came upon them within generations of taking possession of the land promised to them and were the result of their failing to keep the conditions of the covenant. Though Walvoord focuses on the future “spiritual awakening” of Israel as preparation for the millennial kingdom, the

more subtle and important point Moses is making refers to the role Israel's correction will play in leading them back to their One, True God. The real highlight of Moses' prophecy, as we'll see in more detail later, is that God is faithful and will not abandon his covenant with them even though they've abandoned him.

Although this scriptural reference doesn't have direct relationship to the Great Tribulation as Walvoord suggests, it does indicate two important aspects of how God will respond to an Israel gone astray into idolatry;

1. He will allow them to be distressed to the point that they will eventually return to him – *in the latter days you will return to the Lord your God and listen to His voice.*
2. God will not abandon them and leave them to destruction – *For the Lord your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.*

## God Will Be Faithful to Israel

So let's look at some examples of this in the Minor Prophets. Here I'm in agreement with Walvoord when he cites these books and how they describe events for Israel that "go beyond the general tribulation that characterized the history of Israel" and point to "the final climactic time of tribulation that will be followed by restoration."<sup>3</sup> Where he errs, as we've shown, is in applying the "Day of the Lord" to the time of the Great Tribulation.

Joel 2:1-11 – introduces the Day of the Lord and the army of the Lord

- His army is a great and powerful people, the likes of which has never been seen
- They advance like a powerful army drawn up for battle
- Before them the people are in anguish
- They burst through the weapons and are not halted

- The earth quakes before them, and the heavens tremble
- The Lord leads his army, and they execute his word

Joel 2:12-17 – the Lord's call to repentance

- Return to me with all your heart
- Rend your hearts and not your garments
- Return to the Lord your God for he is gracious and merciful
- Call a solemn assembly and gather the people

Joel 2:18-27 – the Lord has mercy on his people

- The Lord says to his people – Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations.
- You shall have plenty to eat and be satisfied
- You shall praise the name of the Lord your God
- You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel
- You shall know that I am the Lord your God and there is no other
- Never again will my people be put to shame

Joel 2:28-32 – the Lord will make with them a new covenant

- I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh
- Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved

Though they were put to shame and brought upon themselves correction from the Lord, his people will be called to return to him and he will show them mercy and grace as they've never seen before. Clearly their harsh and severe correction was meant for their redemption and restoration.

Zephaniah 1:4-6, 14-18

- The Day of the Lord is near and coming fast
- It is a time of wrath, distress and anguish, ruin and devastation, darkness and gloom
- The Lord will bring distress upon mankind because they have sinned



- Death awaits them
- Their idols will not be able to save them
- In the fire of his jealousy all the earth will be consumed

The subject here continues to be the Day of the Lord, which we know begins after his appearing and after the time of the Great Tribulation. Clearly this is a time of continued correction for Israel, especially Judah, but they are not alone in their idolatry and sin (vs 2-6). All the ungodly will face the Lord's wrath. Yet even in his wrath he allows for the repentant (Zephaniah 2:3) and ultimately leads them to redemption (Zephaniah 3:8-13).

The prophet Zechariah, in the thirteenth chapter, speaks of future correction and the removal of sin and idolatry from the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Yet it is in chapter twelve where the Lord establishes his purpose and basis for his judgment.

Zechariah 12:1-3

- He is the Lord, creator of heavens and earth
- He formed man and the spirit of man within him
- He will make Jerusalem a means of correction for all the nations
- It will also be for Judah's correction
- All will be hurt who lift their hands against Jerusalem

Zechariah 13:8-9 – 14:2

- In one strike the Lord will bring correction for all and redemption for some
- The focus is Jerusalem
- The nations gathered against her are used for her correction and redemption
- Then the Lord will intervene for his people and fight against those nations
- Yet many of these nations will survive to come up and worship the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (14:16).

It would seem that Walvoord connects the Day of the Lord and the Great Tribulation partly because of the similarity of the dramatic events evident in both. What the dispensational model he's using fails to recognize are the layers of overlapping purpose God has developed in order to bring some to repentance. Let's review what scripture appears to be revealing about God's will and purpose in the context of these events.

- God allows Israel to be distressed to the point that they will eventually return to him;
  - The Great Tribulation, though motivated by the Man of Lawlessness for the destruction of any who would align with God, ultimately serves to move those willing to repent and returns them to God.
  - The Day of the Lord, although typically viewed only as a time of judgment and condemnation, reveals a much higher and broader purpose; the redemption and restoration of Israel.
- God will not abandon them and leave them to destruction (Joel 2), ultimately . . .
  - the Lord calls many to repentance
  - the Lord extends mercy to his people
  - the Lord will make a new covenant with them
  - everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved

## Israel Is Not Rejected

As unconventional as this viewpoint is, we needn't rely solely on these few scriptures to grasp it. The apostle Paul provides a similar outline of God's redemptive work in Israel for the benefit of the whole world. This can be found throughout chapters 9, 10, and 11 of the letters of Paul to the Romans. I would suggest a full study of these chapters as I will only be highlighting those points relevant to our discussion.

Romans 9:1-5 – first Paul identifies himself with Israel and lays the foundation upon which they are God's chosen people, chosen for a purpose: from their race came the Christ who is God over all.

Romans 9:6-13 – he clarifies that the path Abraham's descendants would follow to bring Christ to the world was one of God's choosing and no other.

Romans 9:14-18 – it is God who sets the scope and role that some will have according to his purpose and will.

Romans 9:19-26 – he poses the possibility that God endures the vessels of wrath with much patience in order to reveal his glory in the vessels of mercy. Israel, though chosen by God, is included in those vessels of wrath – yet Paul will show her end is not set.

Romans 9:27-29 – he goes on to cite Isaiah regarding the number of the sons of Israel. How, in spite of their vast numbers, only a remnant will be saved when the Lord comes to execute his righteous judgment upon the earth. We can see this outlined in the revelation John received from Christ. Israel is the focus of events that precede Messiah's return (Revelation 7:1-8). They are corrected and in their tribulation some repent and seek the God of their fathers and his Christ. Their unbelief is turned to belief.

Romans 9:30-33 – Israel did not secure the righteousness in the law because they pursued it by their works and not by faith.

Romans 10:1-4 – they have a zeal for God but it is misguided; not according to the knowledge of the righteousness of God. Therefore they fail to submit to that righteousness; the righteousness provided in Jesus the Christ.

Romans 11:1 – Israel is not rejected by God!

Romans 11:11-15 – it is through their stumbling that the way was made for the Gentiles. Israel's fall was not to complete destruction. Their trespass leads to riches for the world. If their failure leads to riches for others, how much more will their inclusion mean? It will mean life from death.

Romans 11:25-27 – a partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles is completed. Yet God will make a new covenant with them and take away their sin – just as he has done for the Gentiles he has called and chosen. This is the mystery Paul refers to.

Romans 11:28-32 – Israel as a whole finds themselves enemies of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Just as we were prior to being called and chosen, Israel is not receptive to the gospel. What Paul calls disobedient. Did we receive condemnation from God for our disobedience when he called us? No. We received mercy poured out in abundance. The mercy we received was due to Israel's disobedience. Israel in turn will receive the same mercy from God without condemnation. Why?

For God has consigned<sup>(A)</sup> all to disobedience<sup>(B)</sup>,  
that he may have mercy on all.

A) *Bound up, subjected* [Strong's Concordance]. Clearly the language suggests a proactive and purposeful approach to accomplishing the development of character God requires of His image bearers – especially those to whom he extends immortality through Christ our Lord.

B) *Willful unbelief, obstinacy* [Strong's Concordance]. After departing the God of their fathers for gods of wood and stone, Israel became much like the Gentile world they judged so harshly. Yet even though they join the ranks of unbelievers, God will yet lead them to belief.

It is clear that the relationship between Israel and the rest of the world is intertwined. It is through the stumbling of Israel that the pathway to redemption was made for the Gentiles. What's most surprising is that the relationship between the two revolves around disobedience and mercy – their disobedience and God's mercy. Clearly God is faithful beyond our comprehension and fulfills the claim that God's grace is greater than the sin of man (Romans 5:15-16, 18-19). Is this the realization Paul comes to when he concludes Romans 11 with – *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!* (NASB)

## Summary and Conclusion

Though we neglected to delve into Walvoord's many scriptural references regarding God's preparation of Israel for the coming kingdom, we can agree with his observation that the Time of Jacob's Trouble does span the Great Tribulation and a portion of God's wrath. Where we disagree is in regards to the underlying purpose and its relationship to the rest of the world.

We can see that even in their disobedience Israel is led to redemption just as we, who now abide in the abundant mercy of God, were called out of disobedience into his marvelous light. In the case of Israel there is a connection between the Time of Jacob's Trouble and the wrath of God. God is using the Great Tribulation

and his own wrath as a corrective tool to lead Israel to repentance and ultimately into his grace and salvation. Why else seal the faithful 144,000 to protect them from his wrath (Revelation 7) if not as an example to encourage the disobedient? It is only through God that they can stand. All others will fall.

By failing to account for the purpose behind this connection, the dispensational and pretribulational frameworks also fail to see the relationship between Israel and the rest of the world. Israel, the Gentiles of the world, and the body of believers will all share in the wrath of Satan exhibited in the Great Tribulation, during which their loyalty will be tested and proven. Most aligning with God will lose their life yet find it. Those deceived by the gods of this world, which includes most of dispersed Israel, will continue into ever deeper deception. It is upon these deceived and ungodly inhabitants that the Son of God returns to release God's wrath, subdue the nations of the world, and establish his everlasting kingdom. These are the very activities which surround the appearing of our Lord and Savior and the rapture of his saints. They're also the subject of the next section.

## Notes

1. When I refer to Israel, like the authors of Scripture, I'm referring to the descendants of Jacob (renamed Israel). This does not fit the description of the modern nation of Israel which consists of people from many assorted nationalities. Also, the modern Jews (Judah) represent only one of the twelve original tribes of Israel. In the near future, God will call to himself, for a specific purpose, descendants from all twelve tribes as part of his kingdom-building process (Romans 9:4-5; 11; Revelation 7:4-8).
2. The Rapture Question - second edition, John F. Walvoord - Old Testament Doctrine of the Tribulation (pg 42, p1)
3. The Rapture Question - second edition, John F. Walvoord - Old Testament Doctrine of the Tribulation (pg 44, p1)



### CLAIM III

# There is a Wide Difference Between the Rapture and the Revelation

That there is a rapture, or *harpazo*<sup>1</sup>, where the believers in Christ, both dead and alive, are transformed from their physical existence into a spiritual one where they will dwell with Christ forever, is a biblically sound and well established part of the gospel. What varies, and is being studied here, is the timing for that event.

Using the dispensational framework, both McGee and Walvoord have observed what they rightly identify as two distinct events surrounding the return of our Lord; one for the transformation of believers from physical to spiritual form (the rapture), the other to establish his kingdom upon the earth. So in the first event believers are removed. In the second unbelievers are removed.

“We do the same thing for his coming for the church, then later his coming to establish his kingdom on the earth. . . . There is a wide difference though between the rapture and the revelation (establishing his kingdom). The difference is not only in time. At the rapture he comes as the bridegroom to take his bride, his church, out of the world. Remember that he does not come to the earth at that time at all. But at the revelation he comes to the earth as a king to establish his kingdom.”<sup>2</sup>

Here and elsewhere in his writings, McGee focuses on only two elements, or purposes, surrounding the return of our Lord; the rapture of his church, and his later return to earth to establish his kingdom. Walvoord does the same.

“The revelation given in John 14 is to the point that the



departure of Christ from earth to heaven is required in order to prepare a place for them in the Father’s house, used here as an expression equivalent to heaven. The promise to come again is connected with the return of Christ to heaven with the disciples. Christ is promising to take His disciples to the Father’s house when He comes again.

It should be carefully determined just what takes place at the time of the event here described: Christ returns to the earthly scene to take the disciples from earth to heaven. This is in absolute contrast to what takes place when Christ returns to establish His kingdom on earth. On that occasion, no one goes from earth to heaven. The saints in the millennial kingdom are on earth with Christ. The only interpretation that fits the statement of John 14 is to refer it to the time of the translation of the church. Then, indeed, the disciples will go from earth to heaven, to the place prepared in the Father’s house.”<sup>3</sup>

Though the contrast Walvoord is making between these two events is a valid one, the conclusion derived from them is what we’re studying here. The idea that the two events are remotely connected comes from the inability to see their relationship and the lens from which they’re being viewed.

If however, we let scripture outline the scope of purpose surrounding this spectacular event, we’ll see that it is much broader and grander than either has represented. We will review all the scriptures used by both in reference to this event and note the context of our Lord’s return along with those directly impacted by it.

Scripture	Paraphrase	Focus
Fourth Gospel 14:3	I am going to prepare a place for you. I will come again to take you to me, so that where I am you may be also.	His bride

I Thessalonians 4:16-17	The resurrection of the dead in Christ. Those alive will be caught up together with them in the air, and so shall we ever be with our Lord.	His bride
Daniel 2:44-45	Establish an everlasting kingdom.	Humanity
Daniel 7:9-14	Establish his kingdom upon the earth . . . an everlasting dominion which shall never pass away.	Humanity
Zechariah 14:1-15	Usher in the “Day of the Lord” to fight against those gathered against Jerusalem and Israel, together with all his saints with him.	Jerusalem, Israel, His bride
Matthew 13:41-43	The final judgement upon the world	Humanity
Matthew 24:21-22	Cut short the days of suffering for the sake of the elect (chosen ones) and remaining mankind.	His bride, humanity
Matthew 24:27,30	To reveal himself to the world, who will see him coming in great power and glory.	Humanity
Matthew 24:30-31	To gather his chosen ones from the four corners of the earth.	His bride
Luke 21:27-28	To bring salvation to those seeking it	His bride
1 Thessalonians 3:13	Returns with his saints	His bride
2 Thessalonians 1:6-10	Revealed from heaven with his host of angels to avenge with flaming fire, to be glorified by his saints, and to perform wonders among his faithful.	His angels, His bride
2 Thessalonians 2:1	To gather together the believers to himself	His bride
2 Thessalonians 2:8	Consume and destroy the wicked one at the revelation of his coming	Man of lawlessness
Jude 14-15	Come with tens of thousands of his saints to execute judgment and to punish all who are ungodly.	His bride, humanity
Revelation 1:7	Come and reveal himself to all, even those who pierced him, and all nations of the earth shall mourn over him.	Humanity

Revelation 7	Identified those able to stand during his wrath; 144,000 from the descendants of Jacob and his chosen ones (faithful bride)	His bride, a faithful remnant
Revelation 19:11 – 20:6	He returns on a white horse in righteousness He judges and makes war accompanied by an army arraigned in fine linen, pure and white To smite the nations and rule with a rod of iron To execute the wrath of Almighty God	His bride, Humanity
Revelation 22:12	Coming to repay each according to his work	Humanity
Isaiah 31:4-9	The Lord comes down to fight for mount Zion, to deliver, rescue, and help in Jerusalem	Israel, Jerusalem
1 Corinthians 1:6-8	Christ sustains to the end those who keep his testimony until he is revealed	His bride
Colossians 3:4	To give life and glory to those who are dead to the world	His bride
1 Thessalonians 1:10	To deliver us from the wrath to come	His bride
1 Thessalonians 5:9-10	To bring us to salvation, not wrath, so that we may live together with him	His bride
1 Peter 1:7-9	Rewards the faithful, at his appearing, with salvation	His bride

Hopefully the reader can see, as I do, the broad scope of the many goals and objectives surrounding his return. This is much broader than the two noted by McGee and Walvoord. There is a general grouping these purposes can fit into. But before detailing this grouping, it's important to note a few scriptures that touch on some key motivations for the timing and certainty of his return.

- First, in Matthew 24:21-22, Christ describes a time of trouble and suffering that would result in no flesh left alive unless those days were shortened. How is it shortened? By his arrival – which he then describes. So it's important to him that he cut short the suffering of remaining humanity and his chosen

ones. Obviously the scope of this intervention is equivalent to the scope of the Great Tribulation whether regional or global.

- The second surrounds the revealing of himself to the world, also described in Matthew 24:27,30. Though they will be aware of his coming they will be caught by surprise – since they have no desire to seek or anticipate his return. In fact they will mourn and be extremely fearful at his arrival – because their judgment, which they were forewarned about by the two witnesses, is now upon them. This is also echoed in Revelation 1:7.
- A third motivation is the gathering together with his saints; the rapture. Colossians 3:4 describes it as “giving life and glory to those who are dead to the world” – which his saints are. They see the foolishness and folly of the world and its systems, and long instead for the truth, mercy, and love that is the hallmark of God’s kingdom. As we’ll see, the saints are a key part of that kingdom.

As you look for common threads within these scriptures describing our Lord’s return, you’ll be able to recognize numerous phases (for lack of a better word) that have a logical sequence – each building on the previous until all has been accomplished.

Here are the phases I’ve identified surrounding our Lord and Savior’s return:

1. He appears in the sky and reveals himself to all
2. He gathers his chosen ones, his saints, his bride, and seals a faithful remnant from the descendants of Jacob
3. His execution of God’s judgment and wrath
4. His arrival to earth at the place he ascended
5. The establishment of his earthly kingdom

Any competent student of scripture will notice that there are two key objectives missing from this list;

6. Judge the living and the dead with righteous judgment; the final judgment
7. Bring the Kingdom of God to a new heavens and new earth

These last two are purposely avoided for this discussion since the current focus is the body of believers and their involvement in our Lord's activities which culminates in their receiving the earthly kingdom to which they've been called to serve as rulers and priests. Their role in the final judgment and their part in receiving the kingdom of heaven will have to be addressed at a later time.

Let's continue by detailing each of these using the scriptures that speak to each phase, beginning with the last phase and working backward. We'll be looking for the involvement of two key groups in each of these phases of Christ's work in the Day of the Lord. The first is the nation of Israel. By that I don't mean the modern example of the geographic nation. Instead I mean the descendants of Jacob; the twelve tribes of Israel which includes those of the modern tribe of Judah and Benjamin – the Jews. It is these descendants of Jacob who comprise the people of God to whom the promises were made and to whom Christ will yet fulfill. The second group is composed of the faithful followers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ – his body of believers. I've committed a chapter to each of these phases.

## Notes

1. Source for harpazo, *The Rapture Question* - second edition, John F. Walvoord - Importance of the Rapture Question (pg 12)
2. *Rapture Comes Next*, J. Vernon McGee
3. *The Rapture Question* - second edition, John F. Walvoord - Going to the Father's House (pg 70-71)

# Chapter 5 - Phase 5: Christ Establishes his Earthly Kingdom

This is an enormous topic. In fact, a close scrutiny of scripture will reveal the reference to not just one kingdom but two; first the earthly 1000-year reign of Christ, followed by the heavenly kingdom brought to earth. Clearly this is a single kingdom which transitions from an earthly phase into a spiritual and heavenly phase<sup>1</sup>. For our current discussion we'll limit our focus to the initial, earthly phase; the 1000-year reign of Christ on earth accompanied by his saints as rulers and priests.

It is in this future earthly kingdom where believers first encounter the fullness of life with their King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But to understand the kingdom we must first define it. In P. Schreiner's *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross* he defines it as: the king's power, over the king's people, in the king's place.<sup>2</sup> Schreiner goes on to explain that God's purpose is to complete his kingdom, which;

- Started with the physical creation
- Was inaugurated by His Son on the cross (Daniel 2:31-45)
- Continues as a new creation by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit
- Is established on earth for one thousand years at the return of Christ – the King of Kings
- Ultimately comes to earth, where God's dwelling place will be

By stepping back and looking at the entire plan of God we can't help but notice the connected and cohesive nature of his purpose in leading humanity into his kingdom. God extends great power to establish the fundamental framework necessary for the place where

his children will dwell. Within that universe-wide framework, he prepares a small place, a walled garden, in which he can initially dwell with them. He has created them as his image-bearers in order to have a relationship with them. He gives them power and authority over this physical realm – to be his vice-regents on the earth.

Armed with mortality, free will, and the knowledge of good and evil, mankind now has a framework of their own from which to choose life or death for themselves and others. It is the fruit of their choices and the life they live which will develop their character and determine their worthiness to abide in God's kingdom, the place where God dwells. Will they choose wisely? Mankind, however, has an unseen adversary bent on corrupting God's children. They've strayed far from the ruling role given to them at creation.

Yet the hope of the kingdom is restored through one man, Abraham.<sup>3</sup> God will bring Abraham to a new place and make him a great nation of many peoples. God will bless him and establish him as a ruling house. Those who share in the faith of Abraham will also have their part in the ruling house; a kingdom of priests. This ruling scepter continues down through the descendants of Abraham until it rests on one named Judah. There is a new king who is coming and he will come from the loins of Judah.<sup>4</sup>

This new king will succeed where others have failed. He is the source of righteous judgment, of rescue in time of need, and salvation to those who follow him (Isaiah 6). He is a ruler that will bring truth and righteousness to a people that have known only darkness and deception (Isaiah 9:1-7; 11:1-5). He alone is the servant son of the most high God, and he alone will free those captive to sin and death (Isaiah 61:1-3). In order to establish his place as king he must first humble himself even unto death. His kingdom is not established by the power of his might but by the power of his love and willingness to sacrifice himself to save the world (Fourth Gospel 3:16-18). Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus – the Son

of God initially opens the doorway to his Father's kingdom to those whom the Father will call. He advanced his Father's kingdom not by exploiting his equality with the Father but by humbling himself. As a result he is exalted above all.

## The Purpose for the Kingdom in Phases

The need for establishing his kingdom in phases isn't immediately apparent. It's also hindered by many viewpoints and presuppositions that blur the value of completing God's work in this way. The apostle Paul, though, gives us a very good outline which begins with the inauguration of the kingdom at the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior.

1 Corinthians 15:20-26 (ESV)

*But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*

Since most of the chapter, including this paragraph, develops around the contrast Paul makes between death and Jesus Christ as the source of the resurrection from the dead, he is showing a fundamental component of God's work to establish an everlasting kingdom; the Godhead's power over death. Though an enemy, called the last enemy, death will not hinder any from experiencing the reality of this first phase of the kingdom. Not only is Christ the doorway to life beyond the grave, he's the doorway to the final phase of that everlasting kingdom; the age to come. All must pass through



Christ in order to have any part in the eternal Kingdom of Heaven. With that in mind we can begin to see the need and purpose for what Paul describes must come first:

- To establish the firstfruits of the new creation, a kingdom of priests to rule with Christ.<sup>5</sup>
- To establish dominion over all the nations of the earth along with powers and dominions in heaven. Bringing into subjection all God's enemies. Christ's work will ultimately bring all intelligent beings to his feet and all will recognize his Lordship. However, not all will voluntarily surrender to that Lordship.<sup>6</sup>
- Once completed, this earthly phase of the kingdom is transformed and handed over to God the Father.<sup>7</sup>

I've noticed in scripture other aspects of this earthly kingdom which Christ will bring about in order to complete preparations for the final age to come:

- Christ often spoke of bringing forth light and truth to displace the darkness and deception that permeates the world.<sup>8</sup>
- As the obedient one, Christ's underlying goal is to lead all nations into obedience. Though similar in concept to bringing into subjection all God's enemies, this goal focuses on the redemptive aspect of his righteous judgment through God's mercy and grace. Christ's focus on the kingdom was with its essential character; the demands it makes on its members, the righteousness it requires, and the certainty of its consummation.<sup>9</sup> His earthly kingdom provides an ideal environment for the world to learn true peace and neither shall they learn war anymore. They must come to realize that Christ's righteous judgment, which leads to life eternal, is only true for those willing to surrender to God's will and Christ's Lordship personally.<sup>10</sup>
- To reestablish Israel, God's chosen people, as an earthly, model nation and the central place from which he rules. His promise of a future kingdom includes an earthly realm and a Davidic king.<sup>11</sup>

I'll leave it to the reader to study further into the scope of each of these preparations for the age to come. It is necessary for our current topic to consider the expectations and participation of Israel's children along with Christ's body of believers in his earthly, 1000-year reign (Revelation 5:9-10). The framework for this viewpoint will come from the work Christ has done, is now doing, and has promised to do in the future; to prepare and deliver the kingdom to his Father in the age to come. As we saw in 1 Corinthians 15, Christ's focus is to do the Father's will – prepare His kingdom to come to a new heavens and a new earth. This is the end goal.

The promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob set the scope for this work while focusing first on a chosen people, the children Israel. That scope and the promises were greatly expanded when the Son of God stepped onto the scene. Now those who were not a people are invited to receive the call of God and to be added to the people of God. The expectation for the kingdom of those called in Christ is quite different from those of the children of Israel. Though differing in expectation and even roles for Christ's kingdom on earth, their realities converge during that time. Hopefully this intended outcome will be clearer once we look further into their expectations and participation in Christ's coming kingdom.

## Israel's Expectations for the Kingdom

Israel's expectations for the kingdom could be said to begin with Moses and the establishment of the temple and the sacrificial system. This sacrificial system was one of cleansing and purification, through the blood of animals, in order to approach and dwell in God's presence and light.<sup>12</sup> Surely there was the awareness that these types would find their fulfillment and completion at some future time. Isaiah 9 speaks to the source of this light and the promised "King of Righteousness" who would lead them; a Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:2-7

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light  
shone.*

*You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest,  
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.*

*For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder,  
the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of  
Midian.*

*For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult  
and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the  
fire.*

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty  
God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no  
end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with  
righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.*

*The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*

Yet when he came they did not recognize or receive him. They sought a righteous and heavenly king who would free them from the oppression of these earthly rulers and reestablish their national prominence.<sup>13</sup> Yet he came first as a Redeemer; putting the cross before the crown.

For God's purposes this was fitting, since the king and the kingdom

they sought was always a prerequisite to their complete salvation (Romans 11:1-11). It was never intended to be only national, but personal, individual, and eternal. The kingdom is essential to the complete work of salvation for Israel and for the world. It is both the means of completing that work during Christ's 1000-year reign and then experiencing it in its fullness in the age to come. In the kingdom, Israel will experience the fullness of God's rest to which the sabbath was always a pointer and a type.

Though the scriptures clearly teach otherwise, Israel, and the Jews especially, focused on the kingdom and the salvation that accompanied it as a collective national matter.<sup>14</sup> Restoration of their national prominence was fundamental to their thinking.<sup>15</sup> This was especially evident in the relationship of Christ and his disciples. The Jews expected one thing from their Messiah but were shown something altogether different. Though national prominence is certainly an important aspect of their future kingdom experience, there is clearly more in store for Israel than just national restoration. They are to be the recipients of God's Spirit as an act of individual redemption (Isaiah 59:20-21) and as part of the New Covenant promised to them (Ezekiel 37:12-14; Jeremiah 31:31-34). Yet the light that comes to Israel is not merely for their own benefit, but for the benefit of the nations.<sup>16</sup>

Yet before Israel can come to experience that kingdom, they must first come to know and accept their "King of Righteousness;" the Son of God. They must be willing to let go of their righteousness and embrace instead God's righteousness in Christ Jesus his son (Romans 10:1-4). We know that God will accomplish this in them.

Jeremiah 23:3-6

*Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing,*

*declares the Lord. “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’*

God has already laid out the process that will get them there. It is described for us in the second chapter of Joel.

- The Day of the Lord with the army of the Lord (vs 1-11). This army of the Lord is to execute God’s wrath and correction on Israel and the world.
- The Lord’s call to repentance (vs 12-17). Clearly this wrath and correction is intended to lead many to repentance.
- The Lord has mercy on his people (vs 18-27). He will not leave them to destruction but will lead them to life.
- The Lord makes a new covenant with them (vs 28-32)<sup>17</sup>. And that covenant will lead them to life everlasting.

## Israel’s Participation in the Coming Kingdom

Though mostly unaware of their part, Israel has played a vital role in establishing the kingdom. They will likewise play a vital role in fulfilling that kingdom and its purpose. The apostle Paul outlines clearly for us in the book of Romans Israel’s role in building the kingdom. Theirs was a preparatory role for the one to rule as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Romans 9:4-5

*They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race,*

*according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.*

Paul goes on to explain how this began with Abraham, a Gentile, and continued down through King David (Romans 1:1-4). How it is God who establishes the role of one or many in his plan of redemption.

Romans 9:6-18

*But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. . . . For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. . . . So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.*

Paul is establishing the purposefulness in God hardening Israel as a whole. They failed to accept the kingdom offered them by their Messiah because they failed to accept the Messiah. Based on their unbiblical theology, they could not accept Christ's claim of being from God and one with the Father. Nor could they accept that God would humble himself to dwell in the flesh. In their minds God was far too holy to occupy flesh and blood.<sup>18</sup>

Romans 10:1-4

*Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

They are unknowingly a vital part in God's plan of redemption for the world – a world consigned to the knowledge of good and evil in which the darkness must dwell so that the light may overcome it. However, they and their leaders did not act in a way in which they could be that light to the nations. They instead succumbed to the darkness.

Romans 11:1-2a

*I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. . . .*

Romans 11:11-15

*So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. In as much then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?*

Romans 11:25-29

*Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, (Isaiah 59:20-21)*

*“The Deliverer will come from Zion,  
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”;  
“and this will be my covenant with them  
when I take away their sins.”*

*As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.*

Paul goes on to show a more astonishing truth; that a faithful remnant in Israel, elected by grace, has obtained and continues to obtain access to the kingdom. It is this remnant of Israel who have obtained what Israel as a whole sought but did not obtain (Romans 11:2b-7). Is it difficult to imagine what the role of this saved remnant will be in relationship to a restored nation of Israel? More on this later.

Like the faithful remnant, the dispersed remnant of Israel will be the recipients of this grace, but in the future. At that time, they will serve Christ in his earthly kingdom as a model to the nations. There are numerous scriptures that declare the physical nature of their involvement in Christ's kingdom rule.

Isaiah 66:10-14

*Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her,  
all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy,  
all you who mourn over her;  
that you may nurse and be satisfied  
from her consoling breast;  
that you may drink deeply with delight  
from her glorious abundance.*

For thus says the Lord:

*Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river,  
and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream;  
and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip,  
and bounced upon her knees.*

*As one whom his mother comforts,  
so I will comfort you;  
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.*

*You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice;*



*your bones shall flourish like the grass;  
and the hand of the Lord shall be known to his servants,  
and he shall show his indignation against his enemies.*

**Jeremiah 3:12-18**

*. . . Return, faithless Israel, declares the Lord. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, declares the Lord; I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your guilt, that you rebelled against the Lord your God and scattered your favors among foreigners under every green tree, and that you have not obeyed my voice, declares the Lord. Return, O faithless children, declares the Lord; for I am your master; I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. . . . At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the Lord in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart. In those days the house of Judah shall join the house of Israel, and together they shall come from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers for a heritage.*

**Ezekiel 34:25-31**

*I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places all around my hill a blessing, and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing. And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase, and they shall be secure in their land. And they shall know that I am the Lord, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them. They shall no more be a prey to the nations, nor shall the beasts of the land devour them. They shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid. And I will provide for them renowned plantations so that they shall no more be*

*consumed with hunger in the land, and no longer suffer the reproach of the nations. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Lord God. And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord God.*

*Ezekiel 37:20-28*

*When the sticks on which you write are in your hand before their eyes, then say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land. And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. And one king shall be king over them all, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms. They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.*

*My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes. They shall dwell in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children shall dwell there forever, and David my servant shall be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.*

Additional examples of the physical blessings for Israel in Christ's

kingdom can be found in Isaiah 60; 61; 62; Ezekiel 34:11-16; and Ezekiel 37:11-28.

## Expectations of Christ's Faithful Ones for the Kingdom

As we saw in chapter one, the body of believers clearly has the expectation of deliverance from wrath due to being reconciled to God through his son (Romans 5:1,8-10; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 1 Thessalonians 5:8-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-8).

A second and equally vital expectation is to receive salvation and the inheritance promised them by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As recipients of the New Covenant in Christ, this indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the primary factor which leads them into obedience as they exercise the gift of faith. As we saw with hardened Israel, it was a lack of faith and pursuing their own righteousness which prevented them from attaining what they sought (Romans 10:1-4). The key differentiator for believers in this age and for Israelites in the future kingdom is the same – *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes*. Both find their righteousness in Christ – the Son of God; both respond to the faith delivered to them (Jeremiah 23:6); and both trade the enmity between them and God for reconciliation through their Redeemer.

Romans 5:20-21

*Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Romans 8:9-11

*You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in*

*you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*

Philippians 3:8-11

*Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith – that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

Looking back to the list of scriptures in Section 3, we can see greater detail as to the nature of the salvation sought by faithful believers looking to the return of our Lord. The distinctive form of that salvation goes beyond just physical life but is expanded to a glorified and eternal life.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 – the dead in Christ are resurrected first, and those who remain alive at his return are transformed (1 Corinthians 15:22-23,50-54) and are caught up together with them in the air.

2 Thessalonians 2:1,13-14 – our Lord comes to gather his believers to himself and to reward those whom God has called to be the firstfruits of salvation – that they might obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:4 – To give life and glory to his faithful

1 Peter 1:3-9 – *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus*

*Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. . . . so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. . . . obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

Matthew 24:30-31 – the Son of Man will send out his angels to gather his chosen ones from all corners of the earth.

Luke 21:27-28 – the Son of Man comes with power and great glory to bring salvation to those seeking it in Christ.

A third and equally vital expectation for the body of believers is the fulfillment of their role as priestly rulers in Christ's earthly kingdom. As Daniel's prophecy in Chapter Two of his book focused on Israel's participation as recipients of a kingdom without end (Daniel 2:44-45), his later prophecy shows that God's faithful saints are the inheritors of that kingdom. Daniel 7 details further how this kingdom is established, by whom, for whom, and with whom:

*Daniel 7:9-14 – Then I beheld, and lo, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days did sit; . . . the judge was seated and the books were opened. I beheld, and lo, the beast was slain and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man come upon the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him before him, and there was given him dominion and glory and a kingdom that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting*

*dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom is one that shall not be destroyed.*

The most exciting part for us is seeing our role in this everlasting kingdom. Verse 18 clearly states – *but the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess it forever and ever.*

This is reflected twice again. Once in verse 22 – *until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.*

Again in verse 27 – *And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.*

We should also note that this inheritance of the kingdom by the saints of the Most High does not come without challenges (verse 21) – *As I looked, this horn (that spoke great things) made war with the saints and prevailed over them.* Yet as we should well know, that inheritance is secure even beyond death.

This expectation of rulership in the kingdom is both integral and an essential part of the promised inheritance.

- Each believer, like a living stone, is being built up in Christ as a spiritual house to be part of a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:4-5)
- They are called and chosen to be a royal priesthood that they may proclaim the excellence of him who called us into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9-10)

Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth has created after himself – the called, chosen and faithful, the firstfruits to the resurrection, and a kingdom of

priests to his God (Romans 8:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Revelation 1:5-6; Revelation 5:9-10). These will reign with Christ Jesus for 1000 years on the earth (Revelation 5:10).

*Revelation 20:6 – Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.*

Just as the zeal of the Lord will lead Israel as a whole to the New Covenant, so he will also complete the new creation work in his body of believers. In doing so he not only fulfills the will of his Father he also glorifies himself (1 Corinthians 1:4-9; 2 Thessalonians 1:10).

## Participation of Christ's Faithful Ones in the Kingdom

When we view the development of the kingdom as a process, we can see how the called, chosen, and faithful are preparing now for greater roles in the future reign of Christ on earth. No true Christian would argue that there is one heir of all things; Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Hebrews 1:1-4 – Christ has supremacy over all. He is;

- Heir of all things
- The one through whom all things are created
- The radiant glory of God the Father
- The express image of God
- The one who upholds the universe by the word of his power
- Far superior than the angels

Romans 8:14-17 – Paul clarifies God's purpose for his children and shows a connection between the Spirit and those called to be heirs.

- Those led by the Spirit of God are the children of God; adopted children

- The Spirit of God is the spirit of adoption
- As children of God, these are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ
- Like our elder brother, we must expect to put suffering before our glorification

Why is the Spirit of God so vital to being an inheritor with Christ? Faith and the Holy Spirit are both essential gifts for those who inherit the kingdom. Yet neither of these have we received in full. And it is the Spirit of God which is the guarantor of our future inheritance (Romans 4:15-17; 2 Corinthians 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14).

Romans 8:10-11 – it is the Spirit of God by which your mortal bodies will receive life from death just as God raised his son.

Titus 2:11-14 – Everything promised is held secure and is made manifest in Christ Jesus.

- In him the grace of God has appeared to us
- He is the source of salvation (Titus 1:2-3)
- He leads us into obedience and self-control in the Spirit (Titus 3:4-6)
- In him we wait for our blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of the Lord.

Hebrews 9:15, 28

- As our mediator, Christ has called us to receive the promised eternal inheritance
- The eternal salvation we wait for is delivered to the called, chosen, and faithful at his second appearing

1 John 2:25, 28-29

- The key element of his promise is eternal life
- This is to be delivered at his appearing

Though our focus is on Christ's earthly reign in his coming kingdom, it would be negligent to ignore the work which has been and is being



done to prepare for that kingdom. Most would agree that work of faith began with Abraham and continues to today. The gift of faith carries with it certain promises. One of the promises that enables us to participate in the preparation of the kingdom is the very promise that ensures our inheritance of that kingdom – the Holy Spirit.

Peter 1:3-9 – we trust God to complete in us what he has done already in Christ

- It begins with God's mercy which he poured out on us
- He causes us to be born again
- Through the resurrection of Christ
- To receive a precious inheritance;
  - Imperishable – it cannot perish (die, end)
  - undefiled – it remains pure and holy
  - Unfading – it never withers or fades away
  - Kept in heaven for us
  - To be revealed in the last times
  - Salvation – the salvation of your souls

And when might we expect to receive that inheritance?

Hebrews 9:28 – Christ will appear a second time to save those who eagerly wait for him.

1 Peter 1:7 – that the proven genuineness of your faith may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor at the revealing of Jesus Christ

Colossians 3:4 – *When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

Fourth Gospel 14:3 – *if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself so that where I am you may be also.*

1 Corinthians 15:23 – *But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.*

*Philippians 3:20-21 – But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

*Titus 2:13 – waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,*

*1 John 2:28-3:2 – And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*

Though we live now, through faith, under him to whom all authority has been given, we know that the full experience of his kingdom, our inheritance, is yet future. Those faithful to the new covenant are preparing now for that future kingdom. In part they experience the kingdom rule daily in that they surrender their lives to God and his Christ, waiting for the fulfillment of his promises and his established reign over all the nations. (Hebrews 9:15)

- The inheritance of the kingdom is promised by God to those who love him. It is those who are rich in faith that are heirs of the kingdom (James 2:5)
- God has called us to his glory and excellence, and has granted us his precious and great promises – to be partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:3-4)

It could be said, and some claim emphatically, that Christ's earthly kingdom began on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was formally and visually given to Christ's followers. Certainly this was

the formal inauguration of that kingdom – an essential and preparatory step to the fulfillment of that kingdom at Christ's return. To claim that Christ's kingdom exists in its fullness now would be to miss the preparatory nature of the promise and the reality that all realms are ruled under God's authority at all times. As we saw in 1 Corinthians 15, God's authority and sovereignty exercises ever-increasing activity as the age to come approaches in order to overcome every enemy which opposes the will of God.

The work of faith in the Spirit has been ongoing and will continue well into the future kingdom, being currently manifest in the firstfruits of the new creation. This is fundamental to the called and chosen children God is preparing to be co-heirs with Christ. This new creation points to a unique kind of relationship that leads us to the completion of His purpose for us:

- Based in love
- Abiding in faith
- Living in truth
- Worshiping in spirit, not only in word

#### 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

- It is the will of God
- He reconciles us to himself through Christ
- Giving us the word of reconciliation
- As an instrument of reconciliation to God
- We are being made into the righteousness of God

In Romans, Paul shows the foundation of that new creation is based in love; that the obedience God seeks is not one based in fear – which is contrary to the spirit of love he has sent to us (Romans 13:5-10). In fact, our effectiveness in “*working out your own salvation in fear and trembling*” is directly related to our awareness of the source of that love. It is God who loved us first, and it is by his grace and Spirit that we can love him, one another, and all his creation (Fourth Gospel 6:64-65; Ephesians 1:6,11,20; 2:6; Hebrews 13:20-21).

Faith is the basis of the promise of eternal life; the inheritance all have sought since Abraham. He trusted the God who gives life to the dead and creates that which doesn't exist. Our trust must be likewise; to believe in Him who raised Jesus from the dead for our justification and who offered up His Son for our trespasses (Romans 4:13-25).

It is faith, and the lack of it, that distinguishes the inheritors of the promised kingdom from those who will dwell in it. To inherit is to possess and have ownership in something. Paul outlines in Galatians 3 that it is only through faith, not by the law, that one can have eternal life and ownership of the kingdom (Galatians 3:23-29; Titus 3:4-8; Hebrews 6:11-20; 11:8-12; James 2:5).

To every believer in the Son of God, Yeshua the Christ is truth. He is the substance into which we are called. The one who has fulfilled all temporary forms. Our life, purpose, and future are in him. By looking at Ephesians 2 and Ephesians 3 we can see more of the depth of our relationship with Yahweh through Yeshua the Christ.

Ephesians 2:10-19

- We are God's creation, created through Christ for good works
- Prior, we were Gentiles in the flesh, called uncircumcision
- Different from that called circumcision, namely the children of Israel
- Aliens to the customs and covenant of the promise
- Without God (not a people), afar off (from God)

But through Christ:

- Brought near by his blood
- He is our peace
- He makes both uncircumcision and circumcision one (chosen of Israel one with chosen of Gentiles)
- He breaks down the wall that separates them
- Abolishing the enmity between them
- He reconciled both in one body with God

- Preaching peace to those afar off and to those near
- Enabling both to draw nearer, by one Spirit, to the Father
- No longer foreigners or strangers
- Fellow citizens and children of the household of God

Continuing in Ephesians 3:1-21 – Paul, for the sake of the Gentiles, brings the mystery of the dispensation of the grace of God.

- Who better to reveal the mystery of Christ and the mystery in Christ
- That the Gentiles (uncircumcision) should be:
  - Fellow heirs
  - Partners of his body
  - Heirs and partakers of the promise given through him by the gospel
- The gospel – the unsearchable riches of God's grace in Christ
- Christ – is the mystery
- Hidden from the world for ages
- The church of believers in Christ are the manifestation of this mystery – revealed now to angels and powers in heaven
- It's fulfilled in Christ the Messiah
- Through whom we have access to the Father, since in Christ's death and resurrection we are brought near to God – into the very “holy of holies”. Recall that at Christ's death the curtain separating the “holy of holies” from the common temple area, was torn in two. Christ's death and resurrection not only draws us near, but also opens access to God for those who are already near him.
- This is the height and depth and length and breadth – that all things are made new in Yeshua the Christ (Ephesians 1:10)
- Unto him be glory in his congregation, by Yeshua, throughout all ages, world without end, amen.

As partakers in the death, life, and priesthood of our Lord and Savior, we are becoming that habitation of God intended from the beginning – image-bearers of the God-head. We have yet to see the

fulfillment of that habitation, but wait earnestly for the return of Christ and the reward he brings (Revelation 1:5-6; 5:4-10).

Perhaps the most challenging part of this relationship is worshipping the Father in spirit, and not in word only. Our words alone do not create any substance. Only when they are aligned with motive and action do they solidify into the tangible. This is the mechanism by which God shapes our character.

It's ironic to consider that much of the tangible nature of our physical reality is more for our benefit than for God's. Consider the example of Abraham in Genesis 22, when God asked Abraham to offer his son Isaac on a mountain he would show him. Based on his previous experience with God it is clear that Abraham's motive and intent was to trust God. The proof of that trust came as Abraham aligned his intent with action.

Whether he said to himself or out loud, "I will do as the Lord desires," the fact that he rose the next morning, prepared and led his son to the mountain, and proceeded to offer him is what solidified those words into something tangible - character and trust. (Hebrews 11:17-19)

Character in that he demonstrated to himself and God the alignment of intent, word, and action. Trust in that he trusted God to fulfill his prior promise to bless Abraham through his son Isaac. Whether that would be in the form of resurrecting the offered Isaac or providing another offering in his place.

It's important to consider that God already knew how Abraham was going to respond. He sees the beginning and the end of all things. Being outside of time, he sees all of time. That enables us to see that Abraham was the true benefactor in this manifestation of character. Abraham would experience the proof of that character and the assurance and certainty of trusting in God.

This was just one of Abraham's examples of worshipping God in

spirit and truth. And it's that faith that forms the basis for all believers that would follow. Yeshua himself fills the cavernous void that lies between word and spirit. He explains this in the context of the law as observed by the Jewish Israelites of his day. We can see in Matthew 5:43-48, Christ instructs in the differences between the old covenant and the new:

- The old was divisive and conditional; be kind to friends, hate your enemies
- The new is inclusive and unconditional;
  - Love your enemies
  - Bless those who curse you
  - Do good to those who hate you
  - Pray for those who abuse you
- Such is the mature, unconditional love of the Father – extended to us who were, in times past, enemies in unbelief

The union that Christ seeks for his body of believers is not based on the temporal or physical (including the letter of the law), but instead is based on a different spirit. Worship under the gospel is not confined to forms, rites, ceremonies, and works, but to the substance all of them point to – Christ himself (Matthew 4:8-11/ Luke 4:5-10; Fourth Gospel 4:23; Philippians 3:3-9; Ephesians 2:4-22; 4:20-5:2).

It's that “newness of spirit” that redefines the nature of our relationship with God and his Christ. Here's the dependency of the old covenant:

The former covenant (of the law) was based entirely on obligation and requirements. It did not provide for the liberty of the heart to even express thanks, but dulled the minds of those constrained by it. (Luke 17:11-19, especially verse 16)

Here's the interdependency of the new covenant:

The new is based on a willing heart, responding in love to

the love, mercy, and grace poured out on us by God. That willing heart, though motivated by God's love toward and in us, gives us ownership and a stake in our own salvation not generally present under the former dispensation (Romans 6:11-14; Romans 8:10-17).

By exercising that faith in everything we do, we become an example to the world of the benefits of trusting the Son of God. This is one way in which the body of believers fulfill their purpose and glorify their Lord. We can see this purpose clarified in 2 Thessalonians. Let's identify some of the key details given here. The author outlines the answer to Christ's prayer in the Fourth Gospel 17.

#### 2 Thessalonians 1:7,10-12

- When our Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven
- He comes to be glorified by his saints
- So that our testimony about you (and your belief in him) may be believed in that day
- He comes to glorify his saints with him

So we not only share in the glory of our Lord when he appears, but we also contribute to it – we confirm, add evidence, and proclaim to the world:

- that he is the Son of God
- that he is the Redeemer
- that he is the Forgiver of sin
- that he is our High Priest
- that he is the Resurrection and the Light
- that God loved him
- that God loved us – those he gave to him
- that the world may know and believe (as we know and believe)

The redemption and salvation of the faithful body of Christ is an example to Israel, who will just be entering into the new covenant. They exemplify the glorious reward of those who put their trust and



faith in the righteous judgment of our Lord – a righteous judgment that leads to eternal life.

These faithful in Christ, being fully committed to the will of God and having been fully redeemed by his will, continue with Christ to execute his will and usher in his earthly kingdom (Jude 14-15; Revelation 19:11 – 20:6; Zechariah 14:1-5). Once that kingdom is established, these redeemed faithful have a continuing role to play in it; a role of service and rulership in the holy priesthood of our Lord the High Priest (Hebrews 5:1-5,10; 1 Peter 2:4-5,9-10; Revelation 1:5b-6; 5:8-10; 20:6).

## Summary and Conclusion

By looking deeper with regard to the effective purpose served by Christ's 1000-year reign in his earthly kingdom, the participation and role for each party; the nations of the world, the nation of Israel, and the faithful body of believers (saints), come into clearer focus.

At this phase of our Lord's return the saints have been united with Him and have received the inheritance of the kingdom he prepared for them. This group of saints includes any faithful in Israel's past or present. Together with the called, chosen and faithful Gentiles, these comprise the body and bride of Christ. Being transformed into the glory of their Lord, they will rule and govern with him in the spiritual realm as well as the physical realm. They are the priestly rulers and leaders well suited to judge angels and lead dispersed Israel and the world into obedience to Christ.

For those who stumbled in Israel, they will just be entering their covenant in Christ; *the Lord is their Righteousness*. During his reign they will learn to trust in the Lord as they fulfill their role as a model nation and an example of God's faithfulness. During their time under Christ's rule and King David's leadership, they will grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord, through faith, in much the same way

that believers in Christ have since his work began. And the result of that faithfulness leads to the same conclusion for them at the end of the age – eternal life.

What remains of the nations of the world will likewise come under the rulership of Christ. They too have a part in the restoration of Israel to their homeland. They too can be the recipients of God's grace and mercy. Recall that the underlying purpose of Christ is to bring all the world into subjection under his rule and authority. To do that he must allow a world turned upside-down to reap what it has sown; death. Yet God has shown his power over this enemy also. Christ has committed his very own life to bring all of God's children into obedience to him. Clearly, some will choose not to surrender to God's purpose and love in Christ. Theirs will be the second death; a permanent death from which there is no hope of resurrection or return.

Clearly Jesus Christ is building his kingdom to be delivered to the Father, not through the sword but through his words of life. He is building his kingdom through people. He gives both his words of life and the Holy Spirit to those who respond to his call. This enables them to grow in the character and likeness of the God in whose image they were first created. As the king, Christ establishes the scope of his work along with the scope of work intended for those called to rule with him (Luke 4:18-19):

- To proclaim good news to the poor
- To proclaim liberty to those captive to sin and death
- To give sight to those blinded by deception
- To set at liberty those who are oppressed

As High Priest he must first establish a priesthood of faithful and committed leaders. These firstfruits to the resurrection are being built into a habitation, a temple of God, a new creation. They, together with Christ at his return, will ultimately lead all the nations of the world into a relationship with the Father in a place where he will set his name. Immediately after Christ's return that place

is Jerusalem in the nation of Israel on this small blue globe called Earth.

## Notes

1. Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God, George E. Ladd (pg 69-70)
2. The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross, Patrick Schreiner (pg 18)
3. The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross, Patrick Schreiner - Kingdom Hope Revived in Abraham (pg 34)
4. The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross, Patrick Schreiner - Preservation of the Seed (pg 37)
5. Peter 2:9-10; Romans 8:18-23, 29-30; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; Hebrews 5:7-10; James 1:17-18
6. Psalm 8; 72; Daniel 4; 7:13-14, 19-27; Micah 4:1-5; Matthew 13:41-43; 24:27,30; Ephesians 6:12-13; Philippians 2:9-10; Colossians 1:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 1:7; 19:11-20:6; 22:12
7. Fourth Gospel 18:36; Luke 4:42-44; 19:11-27; 1 Corinthians 15:50; Revelation 21:1-4
8. Matthew 4:12-17; Fourth Gospel 3:16-21; 8:12; 12:46; Acts 26:15-18; Romans 13:12; Colossians 1:12-14; Ephesians 5:5-12
9. Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God, George E. Ladd (pg 73)
10. Micah 4:1-5; Hebrews 5:7-9; Daniel 7:27; Romans 5:18-19, 21; 8:32; 16:25-27; 2 Timothy 4:1
11. Daniel 2:44; Hosea 3:5; Isaiah 11:10-16; 31:4-9; 65:17; 66:22; Jeremiah 30:8-10; 31:31-34; Ezekiel 34:22-24; Micah 2:12-13; Zechariah 8:11-13; 14:1-11; Romans 11; Hebrews 8
12. The Lion of Judah, Rabbi Kirt A. Schneider (pg 43)
13. Isaiah 9:2-7; 11:10-16; 65:17-25; 66:18-23; Ezekiel 34:20-24; 37:24-25
14. The Lion of Judah, Rabbi Kirt A. Schneider (pg 145)
15. Jeremiah 50:17-20; Ezekiel 34:25-31; Daniel 2:44-45; Zechariah 10
16. Genesis 12:1-3; Genesis 18:16-19; Genesis 22:15-18; Isaiah 60:1-3
17. Isaiah 59:20-21; Jeremiah 31:31-34
18. The Lion of Judah, Rabbi Kirt A. Schneider (pg 52-53, 60-62)

# Chapter 6 - Phase 4: Christ's Arrival to Earth

Prior to establishing his kingdom on earth, the returning *King of Kings and Lord of Lords* must set up the place from which he will rule and govern the nations. Though it might seem obvious that the center of rule will be Jerusalem, it will be necessary to see what scripture has to say regarding where and with whom Christ will rule. Another consideration is the role that each of the key groups has in this phase of our Lord's return.

The will of God is not undone by the deceit of devils.

## What Christ's Arrival Means for the Nations

For the nations of the world, the arrival of the *King of Kings* to the earth brings to a climax the wrath of Almighty God (Revelation 15:1). The nations of the world have been deceived by the Beast power, the False Prophet, and the Dragon. It is their spirit which directs the nations to gather around Jerusalem for war, to a place called *Har-Magedon* (Revelation 16:12-16). Again mankind will be the willing pawn in a war between the gods. Though the fate of the battle against the *Lord of Lords* is certain to bring an end to the reign of the gods on earth, the fate of deceived mankind is less certain.

For over three years this unholy trinity has concentrated their effort to deceive and destroy those whom God seeks to redeem (Revelation 12). Yet the will of God is not undone by the deceit of devils. The *Light of the World* has returned to the place from which

he ascended millennia before (Acts 1:11). It is the purpose of this light to lead the world into obedience and into his Father's kingdom in the age to come (1 Corinthians 15:20-26). To do that he must first complete the correction brought upon the world through the wrath of God. To rule the nations he must first strike them down with the sword of his truth (Revelation 19:15); to repay each one according to his deeds (Revelation 22:12). The arrival of this battle and the *Light of the World* signal the climax of that wrath (Revelation 14:1, 6-11; 16:16-18; 19:11-21).

## What Christ's Arrival Means for Israel

For Israel and those in Jerusalem the arrival of the Savior of the world is the signal of their pending restoration; the Root of Jesse, the Lion of Judah (Isaiah 11:10-12; 49:22-23; Revelation 5:5). The Lord has waited to be gracious to Israel, a rebellious people. Yet he will repay their disobedience with mercy. This is the justice and righteous judgment of God (Isaiah 30:18-19; Romans 11:32-34).

Isaiah 30:18-22

- The Lord gave you adversity and affliction so as to not leave you unpunished (Jeremiah 30:8-11)
- But now your Teacher stands before you
- You will repent and cast your foolish idols away

Isaiah 30:23-26 – in the midst of calamity he promises abundance, plenty, and peace for his people.

Isaiah 30:27-28 – though he has brought wrath and destruction to sift the nations,

Isaiah 30:29-33

- You, O Israel, will respond with gladness of heart
- The voice of the Lord will be heard
- The might of his arm will be seen in great wrath, a devouring

fire, with cloudburst and storm and hail

- Zion and Jerusalem will witness the rod of his might when the Lord strikes the Assyrians

Isaiah 31 also describes his return to provide help for Zion and Jerusalem.

Isaiah 31:4-6

*For thus has the Lord spoken to me; . . . so shall the Lord of hosts come down to fight for mount Zion and for the hill thereof. As birds flying so will the Lord of host alight on Jerusalem; he shall alight to deliver rescue and help. Repent O children of Israel . . . then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword, not with the sword of men . . . For the Lord himself will break the Assyrian in his land (Isaiah 14:24-27).*

Overcoming the Assyrian in the land is the first step in God's plan to return, restore, and redeem his people Israel. Zechariah describes the coming King of Zion and his intention; the return and restoration of Israel.

Zechariah 9:9-13

- The King of Zion is coming to you, with righteousness and having salvation
- He shall speak peace to the nations and shall rule from sea to sea

Zechariah 9:14-17

- The Lord their God will save them in that day
- Like lightning he will appear over them and the trumpet will sound
- He will protect them

Zechariah 10:3-12

- The Lord has this against the leaders and the shepherds of Israel

- They have scattered and weakened his flock (Jeremiah 23:1-8)
- But the Lord will be their source of strength
  - He will make them fearless and strong in battle
- The Lord will bring back the house of Judah and the house of Joseph and restore his relationship with them
- The tribe of Ephraim shall become like a mighty warrior, with glad hearts and rejoicing
- Though they were scattered, I will gather them in
  - I will bring them home from Egypt
  - I will gather them from Assyria
- I will gather till there is no more room for them
  - They will be strong in the Lord
  - They shall walk in his name

We can see this future arrival promised in the book of Acts.

Acts 1:9-12

*And when he had spoken these things he ascended while they were looking at him; a cloud received him and he was hidden from their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold two men stood by them in white robes; and they said to them, men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus who has ascended from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as you have seen him ascend into heaven. Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount which is called Olivet, place of olives, which is near Jerusalem, about a mile away.*

It is the mount of Olives where the Lord stands to do battle against all the nations which have gathered against her in the latter days. Zechariah foretells the events surrounding the Lord's intervention on behalf of Jerusalem when the Lord goes out to fight against the nations.

Zechariah 14:1-9

- Jerusalem has been given over to the nations and half its inhabitants will go into captivity
- Half of the city's inhabitants will remain
- At that point the Lord will set foot again on the Mount of Olives
- When he does, the mount will split in two, creating a valley through which remaining Judah will flee
- The light of the Lord will illuminate that day and night, and living waters will flow from Jerusalem
- The Lord your God comes down to be king over all the earth, and he brings all his saints with him

As Zechariah shows, even in the last moments before the Lord intervenes, Judah's correction and punishment is evident; some will continue to be taken into captivity by the nations. It is the Lord's purpose that this correction serves to turn them again back to the God of their Fathers. We can again see the process he's using to lead disobedient Israel and Judah into redemption. It's described for us in Joel 2:

1. Joel introduces the Day of the Lord. Up until that time their correction has come in part from the nations, in part from the wrath of Satan, and finally the Lord himself will correct them. Ultimately this correction is not for their destruction but for their redemption; to lead them to redemption (Ezekiel 33:11, 17-19; Jeremiah 3:6-12; Ezekiel 34:28-31).
2. In the midst of the Lord's correction is the call to repentance – to return to the God of their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They've witnessed that the gods they've followed were not able to save them (Jeremiah 3:12-13).
3. Yet the Lord is full of grace and extends mercy to his people. He will bring them back to their own land and bless them. This is the greater exodus spoken of in Jeremiah (Jeremiah 3:14-18; 23:1-8; Ezekiel 34:11-24; 37:20-28).



4. Finally, the Lord will make a new covenant with them. With his Spirit he will write his law on their hearts; and they will be his people, and he will be their God (Ezekiel 37:11-14, 22-28; Isaiah 61:5-11; 62).
5. All those who call upon the name of the Lord Yeshua will be saved. These the Lord will call from among the survivors (vs 32).

In the process of setting up his earthly kingdom, centered in Jerusalem, he must displace those currently in power and seek to destroy it. Their fate is described clearly for us in the book of Revelation of Yeshua to John.

Revelation 19:19-20:3

*And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.*

*Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.*

Paul too notes the fate of the lawless one who has deceived and destroyed those on the earth.

## 2 Thessalonians 2:8-10

*And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.*

With the source of deception cast aside, the healing the Lord has in mind for Israel and the world can commence. What he needs at his side are faithful leaders ready to assume the role of those leaders who led Israel and her people astray.

## What Christ's Arrival Means for the Faithful in Christ

This is precisely what scripture indicates; the faithful saints return with Christ when he sets down on the earth. Zechariah 14:5 reflects this, as does 1 Thessalonians 3:13 – *so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*

Additional details of the faithful saints returning with Christ is noted in two other passages in Revelation. Let's begin in Revelation 17 when John is shown the fate of the great prostitute, Babylon, and its relationship with the beast power.

- Babylon the great is called;
  - The mother of prostitutes
  - The mother of earth's abominations
  - Drunk with the blood of the saints
  - Drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus
- The world will marvel at the beast because in attempting to emulate Christ (*because it was and is not and is to come*), he will

deceive many (Matthew 24; Revelation 13:1-8)

- Ten appointed kings will receive authority for one hour – they willingly hand over their power to the beast with the intent to make war with the Lamb
- (vs 14) . . . *and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.*

With the realization that the redeemed bride (called, chosen, and faithful) is with the Lord of Lords as he sets down at the Mount of Olives, it establishes the perspective we can take when reading Revelation 19. First, the saints, his bride, are arrayed in fine linen, pure and white – prepared for the wedding feast of the Lamb.

Revelation 19:6-8

*Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,*

*Hallelujah!*

*For the Lord our God*

*the Almighty reigns.*

*Let us rejoice and exult*

*and give him the glory,*

*for the marriage of the Lamb has come,*

*and his Bride has made herself ready;*

*it was granted her to clothe herself*

*with fine linen, bright and pure –*

*for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*

After the wedding feast, John continues to describe our Lord's return to make war with the nations.

Revelation 19:11-16

*And I saw heaven opened, and behold, I saw a white horse; and he who sat on him was called faithful and true, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. . . And he was clothed*

*with a vesture dipped in blood; and he called his name, The Word of God, and the armies which were in heaven followed him on white horses clothed in fine linen, pure and white. And out of his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, that with it he should smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, and he will tread the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he had a name written on his vesture and on his thigh – King of Kings and Lord of Lords.*

Clearly the relationship John is making between the Bride of the wedding supper – clothed in fine linen, bright and pure and the armies which were in heaven followed him on white horses clothed in fine linen, pure and white is intentional. We'll delve into this connection a little deeper in the next chapter.

There is another group of faithful that we would be negligent to leave out; that is the 144,000, the faithful remnant of Israel. This group is first mentioned in Revelation 7 when they are sealed to protect them during God's wrath. They are mentioned again in Revelation 14 in the presence of the Lamb who has set down on the Mount of Olives.

*Revelation 14:1 – Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.*

*Revelation 14:3 – and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.*

So this group of faithful, a remnant of Israel, has been redeemed for the select purpose of standing as witnesses with the Lamb of God as evidence to the righteousness of God toward the whole of Israel and Judah. This act, together with Christ's intervention on behalf of Zion and Jerusalem, clearly motivates many in and around Jerusalem to proclaim *the Lord is our righteousness* (Jeremiah 33:15-16).

## Summary and Conclusion

As we saw in the previous chapter, when Christ establishes his kingdom on earth he has determined a role for Israel, within the new covenant, as a model to the nations. Christ has also prepared a new creation, his body and bride, who will be the faithful rulers with him over Israel and the nations.

When he sets down on the earth and intervenes for Judah and Jerusalem, their time of correction has come to a close. In their realization and repentance they will have mercy and grace poured out on them as they take the first steps in learning to trust in God's righteousness; the Lamb of God. This realization will come in the midst of war as the nations surrounding Jerusalem trample her under foot. Yet their Messiah has arrived to deliver, rescue, and to help. His intervention will save many. And with these he will begin to rebuild Jerusalem and Israel as a model to the world.

But the battle must first be won, the nations humbled, and the power behind them restrained. Only the King of Kings and Lord of Lords has authority and power sufficient to the task. With him though is an innumerable multitude of faithful and committed followers, his army of saints, mounted on white horses, prepared for battle. They are present with him at this crucial and pivotal event. They have a clear stake and a role in assisting Christ in the final preparations to establish his kingdom on earth. It is their inheritance.

# Chapter 7 - Phase 3: Christ's Execution of God's Judgment and Wrath

This is probably the most misunderstood phase of Christ's return, especially when seen through the many erroneous presuppositions held within traditional religion, including pretribulationism. Because the subjects of judgment and wrath are such large and fundamental topics, we won't be able to delve very deep in just one chapter. From the extensive material I've written on the subject for personal study (sufficient for another book), I'll pull some key elements that focus on the purpose behind this part of Christ's redemptive work, so we can see how it applies to the key groups we've been watching.

Prior to the establishment of his earthly kingdom, Christ must subdue, not only the world, but the power behind the world and its systems – Satan. This too is a large topic, and in order to grasp what's happening on the surface, we must touch on the underlying purpose and context for it. To do that it will be necessary to readdress some presuppositions up front.

# Every Worthwhile Goal is Achieved Through a Process

The righteous  
judgment of  
Jesus Christ  
leads to eternal  
life.

Over the course of the first six chapters of this book I have repeatedly identified the presuppositions upon which the viewpoint on scripture is taken. In most cases these presuppositions are mine. In some cases they are the scriptural author's. Most are clearly stated while others are hidden within the context of the ideas expressed on

the page. What they have in common is their reliance on the purpose and goal that underlies the work God and his Christ are engaged in. Some would conclude that that work is the redemption of humanity. In part they would be correct. However, a larger context appears to lie beneath that redemptive work. Let's see what scripture says about that work starting with redemption.

## Redemption Through Death

Redemption in Christ comes through death. It's a process of reconciliation, sanctification, and restoration in the form of glorification (Romans 4:16-17, 23-5:2). That death satisfies the disobedience toward God reaches as far back as the garden (Genesis 2:15-17) and continues forward into the current time (Romans 6:6-7, 23). We all walked in that disobedience until such time that God called us out of it (Ephesians 2:1-10). But it didn't end there for us. Why?

*Romans 5:18-19 – Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's*

*disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*

Here Paul is contrasting the disobedience which leads to condemnation with the righteousness of Christ which leads to justification and life. So the underlying fruit of disobedience is not intended to be condemnation; it doesn't end there. The underlying fruit of disobedience is justification and life in Christ Jesus. For those of us called into Christ, our disobedience led to repentance and salvation through faith. We can see this same thing in the redemptive process used with disobedient Israel, where God's motivation for extending grace is for his name's sake and not according to what they've done.

- It's according to his purpose – what God does for them, not what they can do for God (Romans 8:3-4)
- It's for his name's sake – to show his righteousness in all things (1 Samuel 12:19-25; Psalm 79; Isaiah 48:1-11; Ezekiel 20:33-44)

The details of this were cited earlier in chapters four and five regarding the redemptive process laid out for Israel as recorded in Joel 2:

- The Lord corrects through wrath (vs 1-11)
- The Lord calls to repentance (vs 12-17)
- The Lord has mercy on this people (vs 18-27)
- The Lord makes a new covenant with them (vs 28-32)

As noted earlier, the concluding statement for God's underlying purpose in this redemptive process is given by Paul in Romans 11:32 – *For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.* That mercy comes through the grace of God and the righteousness of Christ. This leads us to a second presupposition that resides underneath the redemption, because redemption is built upon it.



## Righteous Judgment Leads to Life

The righteous judgment of Jesus Christ leads to eternal life. This will be evident for a restored Israel (at Christ's return) just as it is for his chosen body of believers today (Romans 11:15).

*Fourth Gospel 3:17-18 – For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.*

- Christ, the light of the world, brings life (Fourth Gospel 1:4-5, 9-13)
- The condemnation already exists. It was given at the garden when Adam and Eve chose to not trust God but to trust in their own limited knowledge. (Genesis 2:17)
- That condemnation is death (Genesis 2:15-17; Romans 6:23)

Yet Christ's work does more than just redeem humanity. It changes the normal fruit of disobedience, condemnation and death, and turns it into justification and life. And he does this through death. By overcoming death with life, he flips death upside down so that his victory can be found, life eternal, where once there was only victims and loss. That is the nature of Christ's righteous judgment; moving humanity through death, from victim to victor.

Matthew 12:17-21

- My Beloved will proclaim justice ([2920] Noun; judgment) to the Gentiles
- He will bring justice ([2920] Noun; judgment) to victory
- His righteous judgment leads the Gentiles to hope

The author of the Fourth Gospel shows the connection between Christ's judgment and life.

Fourth Gospel 5:25 – *Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead (those condemned to die) will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.*

Fourth Gospel 5:26-27 – *For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.*

That authority to execute judgment which Christ has been given isn't to merely mete out punishment. It's to lead the disobedient through death and into life. That's the underlying will of the Godhead, and a goal of their work (Fourth Gospel 12:44-50).

Fourth Gospel 5:28-30 – *Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs (those dead and buried) will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment ([2920] Noun; judgment). I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.*

- Notice the connection between judgment and life. This is also reflected by Paul (Romans 5:18-19, 21).
- Notice that those who've done good are resurrected to life. In this case, eternal life.
- Those who've done evil are also resurrected, not to condemnation; death was the condemnation (Romans 6:23). They're resurrected to judgment. If Christ is the judge, then that judgment will be a righteous judgment.

Romans 8:1-4 – *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh*

*and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

- God's work in Christ condemns the sin which condemns humanity (Fourth Gospel 3:17-18).
- Christ's work sets us free from the law of sin and death – which is the condemnation (Acts 13:37-39).
- Christ's work fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law; the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

The death of the Son of God, so critical to the redemptive work of God, was established and ordained before the foundations of the world. Since redemption is built upon this aspect of righteous judgment, clearly it precedes that result (Ephesians 1:3-14). Certainly free will is a factor. Though Christ is the source of eternal life (Hebrews 5:7-9), to receive it one must be called and willing to surrender to the Lord of life. If they choose not to receive it, their disbelief is their condemnation because it leaves them without Christ – the source of life.

## Christ's Work Results in a New Creation

As I outlined in chapter five, those called today are the firstfruits of the new creation; those to be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:13). This part of the creation, through Christ, completes what was started in the garden of Eden.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

*From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world*

*to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

- This is the will of God who is reconciling the world to himself through Christ Jesus
- God is making his appeal to others through the work Christ completes in us
- Hence he implores you – be reconciled to God
- Just as Christ is an example of the righteousness of God for all,
- As co-heirs with Christ, we are made into examples of righteousness of God for some

This was not an afterthought on God's part. This was integral to his will and purpose before the foundation of the world was set. Yeshua, the Christ, is the centerpiece and focal point for achieving this new creation, his completed creation. This aligns perfectly with our Lord's intent to deliver his kingdom, this completed creation, to the Father at the close of the age (1 Corinthians 15:20-26).

Ephesians 1:3-10

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his*

*purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

With these presuppositions established as the lens through which we'll view God's wrath, let's see what impact that wrath will have on our core groups; the nations, disobedient Israel, and those faithful to Christ.

## The Impact of God's Wrath on the Nations

The most obvious focus of God's wrath, which Christ has arrived to execute, is upon the disobedient nations. As we saw in the previous chapter, which is a subsequent phase, Christ has arrived on the earth to intervene on the part of Jerusalem and the Jews who inhabit it. The nations, after experiencing the fullness of God's wrath, are led into greater rebellion and a climactic war by the Beast and the False Prophet. This war represents the climax of Satan's efforts to enlist the disobedient of mankind in his rebellion against the true Son of God. Christ's arrival to earth to fight the nations gathered at Jerusalem signals the end of that rebellion and the end of God's wrath.

We've seen the end of God's wrath. Now let's look at where it begins. Let's begin in Revelation 6 to get an overview of events surrounding Christ's ushering in of God's wrath.

Revelation 6:12-14

*And I looked when he had opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell to the earth, . . . and the heavens separated, as a scroll when it is rolled separately; and every mountain and island shifted from its resting place.*

As we've seen previously, these heavenly and earthly signs are a

key marker that precedes the return of Christ. They are noted throughout both testaments to connect events spoken of in these latter days with Christ's second advent.

How then does the world respond to these terrifying events and Christ's arrival?

Revelation 6:15-16

*And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders of thousands and the rich and mighty men, and every bondman and every freeman hid themselves in caves and in clefts of the mountain, and said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb;*

Though the world does not look forward to his return, they will know it when it comes and catches them by surprise. They will know that God's wrath has come upon those who are disobedient, as verse 17 continues: *For the Great day of His Wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?*

As we look through the lens of the presuppositions stated earlier, the death and destruction brought about through God's wrath is multifaceted. With it he satisfies vengeance upon an ungodly world, sends correction for those being led to repentance, and the wages of sin to those unwilling to repent. (Isaiah 13:9-13; Isaiah 24; Jeremiah 30:8-24; 46:27-28; Romans 12:19-21; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-8; Revelation 19:1-2)

## The Impact of God's Wrath on Disobedient Israel

We've already seen the goodness God is preparing for the whole of Israel in Christ's earthly kingdom. Yet before they can have any part in that kingdom, they must first turn from their idols and embrace

the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords with a new heart. It is from that new heart that they will call Yeshua, the Christ – *the Lord is our Righteousness*. (Jeremiah 23:5-6, 33:14-16; Luke 13:31-35)

The correction for Israel outlined in Joel (Joel 2:3-11) is only one part. Their stubbornness and disobedience was foretold even by Moses.

Deuteronomy 32:1-47

- He is the Rock and his ways are perfect
- A God of faithfulness and justice
- Though he created them, his children are a crooked and twisted generation
- In the days of old he divided the land to the nations as their inheritance
- The Lord kept Jacob (Israel) as his allotted heritage
- The Lord encircled him, cared for him, and kept him as the apple of his eye
- Yet Israel forsook God and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation
- Israel pursued other gods that were no gods
- So the Lord spurned them and hid his face from them
- They made him jealous with what is no god
- He will make them jealous with those who are not a people
- I will heap disaster upon them; with arrows, hunger, plague, and beasts
- The sword shall devour them
- And when their power is gone and their gods cannot save them
- Then they will see that I, even I, am he – and there is no god besides me
- He will avenge the blood of his children and repay those who hate him
- He will take vengeance on his adversaries and cleanse his people's land

Isaiah also speaks of these rebellious people who have turned from the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah 30:8-18

- They are a rebellious people, children unwilling to hear the instruction of the Lord
- They prefer illusions and despise truth
- They trust in oppression and perverseness
- They were unwilling to dwell in quietness and trust in the Lord
- Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you
- He will show mercy to you for his name's sake
- For the Lord is a God of justice
- Blessed are all those who wait for him

Jeremiah 30:8-17

- The Lord reassures Israel that he will yet save them from afar
- He will make an end of the nations among whom he scattered you
- But he will not leave you unpunished
- He will discipline you in just measure
- Your hurt is incurable, your guilt is great, and your sins are flagrant
- Yet I will heal your wounds and restore health to you

Yet before that healing, they must endure his correction.

Jeremiah 30:23-24

*Behold the storm of the Lord!*

*Wrath has gone forth,*

*a whirling tempest;*

*it will burst upon the head of the wicked.*

*The fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back*

*until he has executed and accomplished*

*the intentions of his mind.*

*In the latter days you will understand this.*

This wrath and whirling tempest is detailed for us in Joel 2 as the Day of the Lord commences (Joel 2:1).



Joel 2:3-11

*A fire devours before them; and behind them a flame burns; the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness: and nothing shall escape them. The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and like horsemen so they run; like the noise of chariots that rumble on the tops of the mountains, like the noise of a flame of fire that devours that stubble, like a mighty people arrayed for war.*

*Before their presence the people shall tremble; all faces shall be dismayed and confounded.*

*. . . The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble; the sun and the moon are darkened and the stars have withdrawn their shining. The Lord has shouted before his army; for his host is very great; mighty is the work executed by his word; for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?*

As terrible as all this destruction sounds, with God there is always a purpose and always a gracious arm of salvation for those who will call on him. Read further in Joel 2 as he answers the question – who can endure it?

Joel 2:12-13

*Therefore now says the Lord, return to me with all your heart and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, patient and of great kindness, and he averts disaster.*

## God's Wrath and Christ's Faithful

As we established in chapter one, the faithful in Christ are exempt from God's wrath. A question left to answer then is – what is their

role while Christ executes God's wrath on earth? The book of Jude gives us a hint as to that role. Notice especially verses 14-15:

*And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these (the wicked described previously), saying, behold the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgement upon all, and to punish all who are ungodly for all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly manner, and for all the harsh words which the ungodly sinners have spoken.*

So the two key points to notice here is that our Lord returns with tens of thousands of his saints and together they execute his judgment and wrath. The prophet Joel had a similar hint when he was describing the Day of the Lord and the army of the Lord as a means of correction for Israel and the world.

Joel 2:1-11

- The Lord's army is a great and powerful people, the likes of which has never been seen
- They advance like a powerful army drawn up for battle
- Before them the people are in anguish
- They burst through the weapons and are not halted
- The earth quakes before them and the heavens tremble
- The Lord leads his army and they execute his word

Joel doesn't make it clear who it is that comprises this army of our Lord. It's very likely this could be an angelic army. Since we've already seen scriptures that include angels when the Lord appears, this is a reasonable consideration. It's also worth noting another possibility. Note the language Joel uses to describe this army of the Lord: *Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations (vs 2).*

There is nothing entirely unique about the appearance of an army of

angels. Their likeness has been around since before the foundations of the world. However, we can see a similar, unique group of people, assembled as an army for the Lord, outlined in Revelation 19. First, the saints, his bride, are arrayed in fine linen, pure and white – prepared for the wedding feast of the Lamb (verses 6-9). After the wedding feast, John continues to describe our Lord's return to execute God's wrath.

Revelation 19:11-16, 19

*Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.*

*And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.*

This is reinforced in Revelation 17 where John is led to understand the relationship between the great prostitute who is seated on many waters and the scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names. This is the same beast who empowers those who make war with the Lamb as described in Revelation 19.

Revelation 17:11-14

*As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. And the ten*

*horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.*

So at this point, or phase, of his return where Christ is executing God's wrath and judgment, he has united with his bride, the saints, who are changed to spirit and *arrayed in fine linen pure and white*. They are described as an army which follows him on white horses as he descends from the heavens to execute God's judgment and wrath. As the faithful committed to Christ and his work, they will play an active role in preparing the world for his kingdom and rule on earth. Just as he prepares to deliver that earthly kingdom to his Father at the end of his 1000-year reign.

## God's Wrath and a Faithful Remnant

There is another group of faithful we would be negligent in failing to address. Their pathway to redemption was slightly different, yet the end result is the same; they are redeemed from the earth. We can see the point at which they're with Christ and follow the steps that led them to that point. It ends at Christ's arrival on earth to intervene for Jerusalem and Zion.

Revelation 14:1, 4

*Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. . . . It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb,*

At this point, when the 144,000 are standing on the mount with Christ, they have been redeemed as part of the firstfruits of the resurrection (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). Like their brethren, their road to arrive at this point was one requiring faith and trust in God. Because they are descendants of Jacob, it is their ancestors who gave birth to the Son of God.

Revelation 12:5-6

*She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.*

These two verses cover an enormous span of time and recount specific milestones in the mystery of God. Let's review and clarify them:

- She who gave birth is Israel
- Her male child who is to rule all the nations is the Son of God
- He was caught up to God's throne after his resurrection and ascension
- Historically, Israel has been dispersed and has fled out of the land given them and into the nations of the world
- Yet God knows those whom he has called in Israel. Through faith they have obtained what stumbling Israel did not (Romans 11:1-7).
- Though the duration of their nourishment is given, the specifics of the place God has prepared for them is not.

As the faithful children of Jacob, her protection is assured in a special place during the wrath of the beast while her offspring, the body of believers from all nations of the world, will endure the brunt of his wrath. But her offspring know that their victory in Christ is assured, for they are sealed with God's Holy Spirit. They need only endure until the end when their Lord appears in the sky to intervene on their behalf, just as he does later for Jerusalem and Judah.

#### Revelation 12:13-17

*And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.*

Note the clear distinction drawn between the woman (Israel) and her children that keep the commandments of God and the testimony of Yeshua, his Christ. Numerous commentators attempt to assign the New Testament Church to the role of the woman. This is clearly in error. It is Israel that gave birth to the Root of Jesse, the Root of David, and the Lion of Judah (Romans 9:4-5; Revelation 5:5). It was this Christ, the Son of God, who inaugurated (birthed) his church among the tribe of Judah. The Gentiles are the *wild branches* grafted into the olive tree which, though rooted in Christ, began with Israel the natural branches (Romans 11:11-24).

It's not coincidental that the period of protection for Israel's faithful remnant is the same 3-1/2 year period (forty-two months) for which the beast power is given to exercise his authority. What we've come to refer to as the period of Great Tribulation. We can see this described further in chapter 13 of Revelation where the beast and his intent are described.

#### Revelation 13:5-8

*And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and*

*blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.*

We can see the connection between chapters 12 and 13 regarding the remnant of the woman (144,000 of Israel), and how Satan, the power behind the beast and false prophet, will pursue them. These are transported to a place where they are nourished during Satan's wrath. Revelation also shows that they will also be sealed on their foreheads to protect them from God's wrath.

#### Revelation 7:1-4

*After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:*

The sealing of the 144,000 of Israel will, in contrast to those sealed by the mark of the beast who are condemned to death, lead them to protection and ultimately salvation.

- The four angels at the four corners of the earth (north, south, east, and west) hold back the four winds
- The four winds of destruction are part of God's wrath and intended for a purpose

- To harm the earth, sea and trees
- To harm the inhabitants of the earth
- First he must seal the servants of God on their foreheads so they are not harmed
  - The number sealed is 144,000 from the tribes of Israel
  - He alone knows their identity

The wrath of God then commences with the first six of seven trumpets. By sealing and protecting this faithful remnant through these first six trumpets of wrath, God will show his power to save those who trust in him. It's not until the completion of the sixth trumpet that the mystery of God and the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled; the first-fruit harvest of the Gentiles is completed (Revelation 10:5-7). At some point during or at the end of the sixth trumpet, the 144,000 are redeemed from the earth and stand with Christ when he arrives on earth and intervenes for Jerusalem and Judah (Revelation 14:1-5).

## Summary and Conclusion

Understanding the complete work that God is doing through his son is vital and fundamental to properly understanding the role his wrath plays in accomplishing that work. When one takes a deeper look at that work the proactive and purposeful character of God becomes clear. To bring about the redemption of humanity he will demonstrate great patience and longsuffering over the disobedience he will afford them. Yet he knows that with the right approach he can overcome all disobedience, not with the sword, but with grace, mercy, and love. Not that he doesn't use the sword to correct and punish when it's necessary. But these occurrences do not represent the finality of his purpose or his work. Life and a new creation are the finality of the work he and his Christ are engaged in. And not even the opposing forces in heaven and on earth are sufficient to divert him from completing that work. In fact, the opposition aids in the process, though unknowingly.



Though the proud nations will experience God's wrath and destruction, it will serve as a valuable example of the certainty inherent in the fundamental principles built into the reality we've been given to dwell. Death, though a significant barrier for humanity, is simply another element of that reality which God is able to use to lead humanity into a never-ending and fruitful relationship with him.

Israel started out desiring to dwell in that divine relationship into which they were called. Yet over time she was seduced and deceived into following the way of the world – which is in opposition to God. If the judgment of law was paramount, then God could simply destroy them and begin anew. Yet clearly, God also values mercy, grace, and a love that produces life abundantly. To achieve that end for his chosen nation, God will deal with them, not according to their many failings, but for his name's sake. He will not only subdue them with the power of the sword and his right arm. He will lead them to life everlasting with his sword of truth and light – the very Logos of God. They will know that he is the One, True God and there is no other. He will be their God, and they will be his people.

And how can these be assured of this everlasting life which awaits them except an example goes before them; the firstfruits to salvation? Ironically this fulfills the promise that *the last will be first, and the first last* (Matthew 20:1-16). These firstfruits after Christ will glorify God and his righteous judgment in Christ which led to their glorification. Together with the Lamb of God, they will assist in the execution of God's wrath as preparation for his earthly kingdom and his righteous reign. They and the 144,000 of Israel, also redeemed from the earth, will form the leadership of that earthly kingdom. Under the direction of the King of Kings, they will be the shepherds who lead Israel and the nations to worship God in spirit and in truth, so that many can follow in their path from death to life.

# Chapter 8 - Phase 2: The Gathering of His Chosen Ones, His Saints, His Bride

As we saw in chapter one, the faithful in Christ are exempt from God's wrath. The subject to address now is how and when that exemption is applied. The dispensational model and pretribulationism would have you believe that exemption is applied at the onset of Satan's wrath – the Great Tribulation. As we've shown already, that error in timing results from failing to properly distinguish between Satan's wrath and God's wrath for those who are exempt from God's wrath.

## Fulfilling the Exemption from Wrath

In 1 Thessalonians 5 we saw the contrast Paul was making between a destiny of wrath and that of salvation. The destiny of the faithful is clearly that of salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:8-10). Notice also that the certainty of that salvation extends beyond death – so that whether we are awake (alive) or asleep (dead) we might live with him. We also saw when that

wrath will come upon the ungodly and sinners of the world; when the righteous judgment of God is revealed to the world. This also coincides with when our exemption is applied. Paul spoke of it there in 2 Thessalonians 1.

For the great  
day of their  
wrath has come,  
who is able to  
stand?

2 Thessalonians 1:7 – *and to grant relief to you who are*

*afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire,*

If we're to trust God's promise of exemption from wrath then we must look to that exemption to occur before his wrath occurs. What have we seen already in the progression of his work?

- Phase 3: The Son of God alone has power to execute God's wrath to satisfy his vengeance upon an ungodly world, to correct those being led to repentance, and to exact the wages of sin upon those unwilling to repent. All this he accomplishes with the help of his angelic and spiritual armies.
- Phase 4: As the final step in completing God's wrath and subduing the world and the powers behind it, Yeshua the Christ will set foot on the Mount of Olives to intervene for Zion and engage in the climactic battle with the beast and the nations gathered with him.
- Phase 5: With the war won and the opposing forces displaced, the work of setting up his kingdom on earth can commence. At this point he now has faithful leaders in the heavens and on the ground who are committed to his work and God's will for humanity.

At some phase of his return, the faithful, alive at the time, are united with those who have died in Christ, since the dead are resurrected first. Together they continue with him to complete the following three phases: execution of God's wrath, his arrival to earth to do battle, and the establishment of his kingdom. Since scripture shows them with a role in these subsequent phases, we can conclude that at some point prior to the execution of God's wrath they are somehow exempted from that wrath.

If we return to Matthew 24, we are reminded of Christ's motivation for returning when he does.

*Matthew 24:22 – And if those days had not been cut short, no*

*human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.*

He's returned to halt the tribulation before all mankind is lost and to end the persecution of his chosen ones. First, the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky for all to see (his appearance phase).

*Matthew 24:30 – Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

Christ is seen coming in the clouds of heaven. What happens next?

*Matthew 24:31 – And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds (four corners of the earth – north, south, east, west), from one end of heaven to the other.*

Gather them for what purpose?

*Matthew 24:33 (NKJV) – So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near – at the doors!*

What has arrived and is near at the doors?

*1 Peter 1:7-9 (NKJV)*

*that the genuineness of your faith, . . . may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, . . . receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls.*

It seems clear that one of the motivations for the timing of Christ's return is to cut short the suffering of his elect at the hands of the beast power (Satan's wrath). He has promised to bring them salvation while at the same time delivering them from God's wrath to come. Let's look at how this is done.

*1 Thessalonians 1:10 – and to wait for his Son from heaven,*

*whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

And again in 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10

*For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.*

Paul is also making a distinction between those who are awake (are alive) and those who are asleep (have died in Christ). 1 Thessalonians 4 makes it clear that there is an order to the gathering of all the saints – dead and alive.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

*For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, . . . And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.*

If we look further in 1 Thessalonians 4, we can see that Paul implies that our Lord's return is a process. Reread from verse 13 through 18. I'll note some highlights:

- Those who have died in Christ, God will bring with him. This is the general promise. The details of how follows:
  - The Lord will descend from heaven with a shout
  - This shout appears to be what calls the dead in Christ to rise first
  - Then we who are still alive shall be caught up
  - Together with them we meet our Lord in the air

So there is a progression or order to the process of collecting his chosen ones both dead and alive at that time. The dead are called from the graves and resurrected first. This is also clarified in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, where Paul describes the resurrection of the dead and transformation of the living to incorruptible spirit.

It makes sense then that Christ can achieve all of this while still in the process of returning to the earth without actually setting foot on the earth yet. If we go back to Matthew 24:30-31, we can see some of the details for this process explained there.

- The sign of the Son of Man appears in the sky
- From the sky, he sends his angels to gather his chosen ones from the four corners of the earth
- His angels collect them from one end of the heavens to the other and bring them to him

One has to admit that that last statement (in verse 31) seems a little odd when speaking of physical beings, since people don't typically fly. And we can't project the idea into the modern day with jets as some might claim. Since both the resurrected and the transformed saints are now spirit, it is very reasonable that they can take flight into the air. This makes the statement in verse 31 much more relevant and within the context of the author's perspective. It also allows for the angels to gather us to meet the Lord in the air without him having to descend completely to the earth first. The reason for this becomes clearer as we continue.

In case there is any doubt about the fate of those dead in Christ, let's look at the details of this event provided by Paul in 1 Corinthians regarding those having part in the first resurrection. (1 Corinthians 15:23; Ephesians 1:11-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; Revelation 20:4-6)

1 Corinthians 15:42-44

*So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.*

It is clear then that those dead in Christ will be resurrected to

a spiritual body. What then of those alive when Christ returns to gather them? Paul details this further in verses 51-53.

1 Corinthians 15:51-53

*Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.*

Wow, now that's a change worth looking forward to! Whether we pass through death or get to see our Lord's appearing first hand, we'll still be part of it. Up to this point we've answered how Christ gathers his elect. Let's continue to focus on when this monumental event occurs.

## Who is Able to Stand?

If you recall from chapter seven, the 144,000 from Israel make up a faithful remnant who are sealed on their foreheads to protect them from God's pending wrath to be executed by Christ, who has appeared in the clouds of the heavens. The introduction of the 144,000 occurs in Revelation 7. Let's step back and review the appearance of our Lord described in Revelation 6 and compare that with the description provided in Matthew 24.

Revelation 6	Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21
<p>The Sixth Seal (6:12-14)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A great earthquake</li><li>• The sun is darkened</li><li>• The moon becomes like blood</li><li>• The stars fall from the sky</li><li>• The sky rolls back like a scroll</li><li>• Every mountain and island was displaced</li></ul>	<p>Prior to the appearance of the Son of Man (24:29-30)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The sun is darkened</li><li>• The moon loses its light</li><li>• The stars fall from heaven</li><li>• The powers of the heavens are shaken</li></ul>

<p>The Wrath of the Lamb (6:16-17)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The great leaders of the world hide from God and the pending wrath of the Lamb</li><li>• The great day of their wrath has come</li><li>• Who can stand?</li></ul>	<p>Appearance of the Son of Man (24:30-31)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The sign of the Son of Man appears in the heavens</li><li>• All will see him coming in the clouds of heaven</li><li>• With power and great glory</li><li>• He sends his angels out with a trumpet call to gather his elect from the four winds (north, south, east, and west)</li></ul>
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Before God’s wrath begins, a pause is introduced. Note that Revelation 7 begins as an answer to Revelation 6:17 – *for the great day of their wrath has come, who is able to stand?*

Revelation 7:1-3 – The four angels holding back the wind are clearly intending to hurt the earth and those who dwell there.

- The wind is symbolic of destruction, calamity, and desolation
- These are being restrained temporarily so that those God intends to protect from his wrath are sealed – marked as belonging to him
- Other angels will shortly dispense God’s wrath outlined in the seven trumpets to follow the seventh seal (Revelation 8).

There are two distinct groups who will stand, each in their own way. One group is the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel (vs 4-8). Though sealed for protection before God’s wrath begins, they are not redeemed until just before the seventh trumpet (Revelation 14). The second is an innumerable group, the faithful in Christ, who’ve come through the tribulation (vs 14). It seems clear to this reader who these are that receive white robes. Yet there seems to be an ongoing dispute over their identity. This dispute appears to arise from the conflicts evident when viewed through the lens of the pre-tribulation perspective, the dispensational model, or Daniel’s Seventy-Weeks prophecy. Let’s set these viewpoints aside momentarily to consider the plain and simple reading of the event.

Revelation 7:9-10



*After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*

In verse nine we are introduced to a great multitude of many nations and languages, and they stand before the throne of God in the presence of the Lamb – clothed in white robes and with palms in their hands. Note also that the subject of their praise is God’s salvation.

To accurately understand who these people are, we must look at the attributes assigned to them by the author:

- innumerable multitude (no man can number)
- of every nation, people, kindred, and tongue
- clothed in white robes
- palms in their hands

The first attribute “innumerable multitude”, is also rendered “no man can number”. A group of Gentiles of any scope can be numbered quite easily. We call it a census. So if the group could be easily identified and counted in a census, then they could be numbered. But a group that consists of the Holy Spirit, whose names are written in the Book of Life – these no man can number. Only our Lord would be able to count all those that are his. These are the people ransomed for God through the ages from every nation, language, and people (Revelation 5:9-10).

The white robes represent the righteousness in Christ gained by those who put their trust in him (Revelation 19:8). In Ecclesiastes 9:7-10 the author advises on how to live. He suggests that our garments be white and our head anointed with oil. White garments were worn by angels when they appeared to men. Christ himself was

arrayed in dazzling white when he was transfigured before Peter, James, and John. (Mark 9:2-3, Luke 9:28-29)

In Christ's assessment of the seven congregations, the need for white clothing was mentioned in the case of Sardis and Laodicea.

*Revelation 3:4 – Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy.*

*Revelation 3:17-18 – For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, . . . I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself . . . and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.*

The final attribute mentioned about the multitude is the palms in their hands. The waving of palms was a form of worship and respect for high authorities. Even our Lord, upon his arrival into Jerusalem as the King of the Jews, was greeted by those who recognized and honored him waving palms and laying them on the path before him. So it becomes clear that those spoken of here are those who arrayed themselves in white through trust in Yahweh, exercise faith in our Lord Yeshua, and worship and honor God alone.

*Revelation 7:11-14*

*And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."*

*Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones*

*coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

In addition to the praise of salvation given by the great multitude earlier, the inhabitants of heaven collectively offer praise and thanks to God for the work he has completed thus far in the redeemed firstfruits assembled before him. One of the elders asks a leading question to highlight who this innumerable group is. It appears that this “great multitude” is the body of believers, made up of peoples from every nation, countable only by the Lord because of the Spirit of God which seals and unites them. And the multitude are arrayed in white robes and are worshipping with palms in their hands. These are before the throne of Yahweh giving praise for their salvation

## Summary and Conclusion

Clearly this innumerable group, called into grace by faith in our Lord, are those redeemed throughout the ages who’ve come through tribulation, with the last of the group coming out of Great Tribulation. Collectively and individually they’ve made themselves worthy through faith, making their robes white through the sacrificial blood of their Messiah, Yeshua (Revelation 1:5; 7:14). These were sealed by the Holy Spirit in their walk of faith with the Lord. Their protection from the wrath of God comes in the form of their transformation, being resurrected and changed from mortal to immortal, from a natural body to a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:42-54).

They now stand with their Christ to continue with him in his work to execute God’s wrath, to return with him to defeat the nations gathered against Jerusalem, and to establish and reign with him for a thousand years in his earthly kingdom. All of this work and effort are to achieve his purpose of preparing the kingdom for his Father in the age to come (1 Corinthians 15:22-26).

# Chapter 9 - Phase I: Christ's Appearance in the Sky

This brings us to the first of the phases – his appearing. Let's return to Matthew 24. There are several key points to note, similar to those Paul noted in 2 Thessalonians 2 – especially these things that precede his appearing. Let's start with verse 29.

Matthew 24:29 – *Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

Christ's return and appearance in the sky will mark the end of an era and signal a new future for all humanity.

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days” refers to the Great Tribulation spoken of in verse 21. Verse 22 brings us back to one of the motivating reasons for Christ to initiate his return – “for the sake of the chosen ones those days will be shortened”.

The remaining part of verse 29 is describing that pivotal catastrophe to befall the earth and all its inhabitants prior to Christ's return. It is described many times throughout the testaments, but Revelation marks the event and describes it clearly.

Revelation 6:12-14 – *When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth . . . The sky vanished like a*

*scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.*

So this important marker is given to indicate what will precede the appearing of our Lord. Luke also identifies these signs as a marker preceding the appearing of our Lord.

Luke 21:25-28

*And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*

This echoes precisely what we saw in Matthew and in Revelation. It also outlines what we've been tracking in the phases of Christ's return – that he appears to the world, then brings salvation to his chosen ones.

## The Hope of Glory for His Body of Believers

This single event, Christ's appearance, is the hope and focus for countless millions; some alive, many already dead. It is core to the gospel and a central pivot point from which the future of humanity rests. Yet for many that future, and perhaps even that gospel, is cloaked in mystery. That is not by accident. In order to see it one must align with Christ and give way to the Holy Spirit. In that light, let's return to the details of God's mystery and see what Paul describes as the hope of your glory and when that will occur.

Colossians 1:25-28

*of which I (Paul) became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.*

Here are some observations:

- Paul, a revealer of the current dispensation of God – that is, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ
- A revealer of the mystery, now made known by the will of God
- That mystery – salvation to the Gentiles through Christ's death (1 Corinthians 2:6-8)
- In the form, or manifestation of, Christ in you, the hope of your glory
- Which we will see at his appearing (Colossians 3:4)
- Paul's motivation or expectation is that everyone (Jew or Gentile) can come to maturity in Christ

Paul speaks further regarding the mystery of God in chapter 2.

Colossians 2:1-15

- Accepting Christ is the first step
- The next is to be led by him
- Grow in Christ – rooted and built up in him, abounding in thanksgiving
- Do not be deceived by
  - Philosophy and vain deceit
  - The teaching of men
  - The principles of the world
- But follow Christ – in whom is the fullness of the Godhead
  - He is the head of all angelic orders and powers
  - You were circumcised of your sin through him

- You were buried with him
- You were raised from the dead with him
- You were once dead due to sin
- He has forgiven your sin – nailed it to the cross
- He overcame the mortality of mankind and exposed his power over death

Again in Colossians 3:1-4

- Seeing you are risen (from the dead) in Christ:
  - Seek things which are above
  - Set your mind on things above
  - You are dead and your life is hidden with Christ in God
- When Christ, the source of our eternal life appears, we shall also appear with him in glory

Is this the only example of when and how we receive our hope of glory?

Scriptural Ref	When and How We Receive Our Hope of Glory
Fourth Gospel 14:1-3 (17:20-24)	<b><i>I will come again and take you to me</i></b> so that where I am you may be also.
Matthew 24:21-31 Mark 13:19-27 Luke 21:25-28	<i>But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. . . And <b>he will send out his angels</b> with a loud trumpet call, and <b>they will gather his elect</b> from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.</i>
1 Thessalonians 3:13	<i>. . . so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, <b>at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.</b></i>
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18  (1 Corinthians 15:51-53)	<i>. . . we who are alive, who are left <b>until the coming of the Lord</b>, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For <b>the Lord himself will descend from heaven</b> with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so <b>we will always be with the Lord.</b></i>

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10	... and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, <b>when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels</b> , ... <b>when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints</b> , and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.
2 Thessalonians 4:1-4,8	Now concerning the <b>coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him</b> , we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.
1 Corinthians 15:19-24	But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, <b>then at his coming those who belong to Christ</b> . Then will come the end,
Philippians 3:20-21	But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it <b>we await a Savior</b> , the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.
1 Thessalonians 1:10	... how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and <b>to wait for his Son from heaven</b> , whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.
1 Thessalonians 2:19	For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which <b>we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes?</b> Is it not you?
1 Thessalonians 5:8-10, 23	For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that <b>whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him</b> . ... be preserved complete, without blame <b>at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ</b> .
Titus 2:11-14	For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ... waiting for our blessed hope, <b>the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ</b> ,
Hebrews 9:27-28	... so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, <b>will appear a second time</b> , not to deal with sin but <b>to save those who are eagerly waiting for him</b> .
1 Peter 1:7,13	so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor <b>at the revelation of Jesus Christ</b> . ... set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you <b>at the revelation of Jesus Christ</b> .



1 John 2:28; 3:2	And now, little children, abide in him, so that <b>when he appears</b> we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame <b>at his coming</b> . Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that <b>when he appears</b> we shall be like him, because <b>we shall see him</b> as he is.
Revelation 19:11-14 (19:7-8)	Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, <b>were following him</b> on white horses.
Revelation 20:4-6	... This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in <b>the first resurrection!</b> Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.
James 5:7-9	Be patient, therefore, brethren, <b>until the coming of the Lord</b> .

Repeatedly scripture reminds those seeking to follow Christ that their hope for glorification is secure in him and will be delivered to them upon his revelation to the world. It clarifies his desire that his chosen ones would not be deceived by those who would claim he is coming at a time which is clearly counterfeit to his teaching. That places the burden upon those of us who claim to be followers of Christ; to prove these things with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

## The Hope of Resurrection for Israel

The mistake those who follow Christ should seek to avoid is the assumption that it's all about them. The work Christ is doing at this time in preparation for his kingdom to come is only one part of a larger purpose; a purpose which includes Israel and her descendants. Theirs is a similar hope for life and a future beyond death.

Job 14:14-17	<i>If a man dies shall he live again? All the days of my service I would wait, till my renewal should come. . .</i>
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Psalm 17:15	<i>As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.</i>
Isaiah 26:19	<i>Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.</i>
Daniel 12:2	<i>And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.</i>
Ezekiel 37:13-14	<i>And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord.</i>

## Summary and Conclusion

When it comes down to it, Christ's return and appearance in the sky will mark the end of an era and signal a new future for all humanity. A future that leads to a new age, a new heavens, and a new earth. To get to that point, Christ must finish the work he began on the cross. And to finish that work requires a methodical and purposeful process; a process scripture has laid out before us so that we can see and understand. Paul actually outlines three of the five phases when he describes our Lord's revealing in the heavens in 2 Thessalonians.

Phase 1 – Our Lord's appearing (2 Thessalonians 1:7) *and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire,*

Phase 2 – Gathering his chosen ones (2 Thessalonians 1:10) *when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.*

Phase 4 – Executing God's wrath (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9) *inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on*

*those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.*

So let's take a moment and summarize what scripture is telling us about these numerous parts, or phases, of Christ's return. Without any other filter through which we're trying to fit these events, there does appear to be a clear span of time and purpose for the process Christ is fulfilling.

1. The initial part of Christ's return involves his appearance to the world. Not in secret, but in glory and power. With that appearance, Christ shifts attention from the destruction of those faithful to him and alerts the powers of the nations to his arrival. The world was already forewarned by the message of the two witnesses. Their role over the similar span of time is to counter the ongoing deception of the beast and the false prophet with God's truth and light (Revelation 11). Those who are deceived and love the lie will not heed their warning, and the nations will cower in fear at the Lord's appearing.
2. To ensure some of his faithful are alive at his return, the day and hour of his return are left to God's timing. While maintaining his place in the heavens, Christ instructs his angels to go forth to the four corners of the earth (north, south, east, west) and from one end of the heavens to the other and gather his chosen ones. This includes first resurrecting those who have died in Christ. And we do know that their resurrection will precede the gathering together of those still alive with them in the air as transformed beings with a spiritual body. We don't hear of Christ's arrival to earth until the last of the seven trumpet judgments.
3. The Lamb of God is the only one worthy to execute God's wrath, vengeance, and correction upon an ungodly world. This includes those of the house of Judah. Yet through that

correction he will lead them into a new covenant and they will see Yeshua the Christ as the Lord their Righteousness. Not only will they have the example of Christ but they will witness a faithful remnant of Jacob who are sealed and protected from the wrath of God. These 144,000 of their brethren will go before them as firstfruits of salvation to guide the rest of their nation toward Christ in his earthly kingdom. The Gentile firstfruits from every nation, people, and tongue, who've already been redeemed from the earth, will continue with their Lord to subdue the nations and prepare for the establishment of his kingdom reign on earth.

4. The final step in securing his reign is the climactic battle with the powers of darkness and the deceived nations gathered near Jerusalem. Christ will arrive with his army and stand on the Mount of Olives to deliver, rescue and extend help to Jerusalem and those Jews still inhabiting it (Isaiah 31). The outcome of this battle is hardly surprising.
5. Each of these main milestones represent only a handful of the many steps Christ will take to complete the work his Father has given him; when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). And finally, we not only formally receive the kingdom he sets up and establishes on the earth, our inheritance, we get to have a significant part in the final stages of its completion. A kingdom we can be assured will have no end.

Where Walvoord and McGee saw only two events over a long span of time (7 years), scripture reveals at least these five events, which appear to span many days if not several months. With a clear distinction made between the period of Satan's wrath and that of God's wrath, all the various steps necessary to achieve the Father's underlying goal fall into place like the pieces of an enormous and complicated puzzle. I submit that the picture being created is not

like any we've imagined. Nor will there be sufficient words to describe the depth of wisdom and sense of it all.

Better to stand in silence and gaze in awe at the wonders the God of the universe has brought to life.

## CLAIM IV

# The Doctrine of Imminence Requires a Pre-tribulation Rapture

The conclusion and resulting claim by Walvoord regarding the imminent return of our Lord and the pre-tribulation rapture is derived from several elements. The first of these is the clear distinction Walvoord sees in activities surrounding Christ's return to gather his body of believers and his work to establish his kingdom on earth. This forms the third claim which has been thoroughly addressed in the previous section. Walvoord's inability to reconcile the relationship between these two elements of our Lord's return leaves the pre-tribulation rapture as the only viable conclusion.

The second element is similar. It is the concept of "going to the Father's house" as derived from the fourteenth chapter of the Fourth Gospel and how that is clearly separate from Christ's arrival on earth with his saints.<sup>1</sup> The phases of Christ's return, detailed in section 3, accurately outline the relationship between the rapture of the saints and His arrival to earth to establish His earthly kingdom. When viewed as a process of several phases to achieve separate tasks, taken together they support the primary goal. This fully clarifies the distinction between these two events, and by separating Satan's wrath from God's wrath, correctly places the redemption of the saints at the end of the Great Tribulation, which Christ brings about by making his appearance known to the world.

The third element is Christ's return as the basis for comforting his body of believers. Here Walvoord correctly recognizes the hope and expectation of believers in Christ is that of the resurrection. Yet from that clear realization a more dramatic claim emerges. See if you can note it.

“In addition to the exhortation “Do not let your hearts be troubled,” there is coupled with the doctrine of the coming of the Lord in John 14:1 the charge “Therefore encourage each other with these words” (1 Thess. 4:18). The doctrine of the coming of the Lord was a comfort or encouragement to the Thessalonian Christians. This comfort was not merely that their loved ones would be raised from the dead, a doctrine with which they were no doubt familiar, but the larger truth that they would be raised in the same event as Christians would be translated. This they had been taught as an imminent hope. In 1 Thessalonians 1:10 they are described as those who “wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from coming wrath.” Their hope was the coming of Christ and they had been delivered from all wrath to come, including the wrath of the future tribulation period.”<sup>2</sup>

What is the basis for the comfort of those faithful to Christ? Is it deliverance from all wrath or receiving the salvation of our souls, or both? Let’s begin with the scriptures Walvoord noted. We’ll broaden their context slightly and see what is brought to light.

#### Fourth Gospel 14:1-7

*Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going. Thomas said to him, Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.*

Here Christ is describing the basis for their quieted hearts – belief

in God and belief in him. He even goes so far as to outline the foundation of that belief in him; his relationship to the Father – I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

- The way – it is only through faith in Christ, whom they have seen, that they can approach the Father, who they have not seen. The Son is the express image of the Father. He alone has made the way to the Father possible. Even with the grace and calling of God, it would produce nothing of note without the sacrifice, death, and burial of the Son. That is why baptism into Christ's death is so vital. As Paul details so well in Romans 6, death by itself frees one from sin (vs 7) and satisfies the requirement of the law (vs 20-23). It is only in Christ's death that we find a change in our state; from disobedience to righteousness, from unholy to holy (vs 10-19). It is only in that righteous and holy state that we come before God's throne.
- The truth – Jesus Christ is the manifestation of truth (Fourth Gospel 1:14-17). And the nature of that truth? The awareness and knowledge of God by the indwelling of the Spirit of God (Fourth Gospel 14:16-17). Christ, being the express image of the Father, is the Father's manifestation to those he has called to himself. As one with the Father, he is the source of truth. It is this truth that the world lacks (Fourth Gospel 8:31-59). It is this truth that leads to life everlasting (Fourth Gospel 17:3).
- The life – just as we find our state changed through the death of the Son, we also find eternal life available only in him. Returning to Romans 6, Paul clarifies the pathway to the one (eternal life) comes through the other (Christ's death) – *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.* and *Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.* The core tenant of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the hope of the resurrection of the faithful to eternal life through his truth –



his words of life.

Belief is not a one-time event. Belief in Christ is an ongoing expression. Just as Yeshua is the express image of the Father, so too are we to be the express image of him. All of life's experiences, challenges, and trials, are an opportunity to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord.

1 Thessalonians 1

*Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.*

*We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

The Thessalonians demonstrate this growth, and Paul praises them for it. Did that praise and their growth come by escaping trials? No. It came through much affliction. Faith untested is unproven. Words

alone cannot manifest the fruit of faith and belief. Only by aligning those words with deeds and actions is the genuineness of our faith proven. We've seen already in scripture, old and new, where the Beast is given power to destroy those who keep the testimony of Christ. Yet Christ admonishes us to endure until the end. (Matthew 24:9-13; Mark 13:12-13; Luke 21:16-19; 1 Peter 4:12-19)

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

*But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

Death is not the enemy. Christ has overcome death. Deception and the lie – they are the enemy. But we have the truth, if we dwell in the Spirit of truth. Our hope is in the salvation that our Lord brings with him at his appearing. God's promise is to deliver his faithful from his wrath that comes upon the world. He makes no promise to deliver us from the wrath of the world. Yet through the wrath of the world he will prove his faithfulness to all those who trust in him.

The fourth and last element of Walvoord's claim is the absence of any intervening events in connection with our Lord's return to gather his faithful. He asserts that the existence of such events destroys the imminence of that return. This is partially derived from his application of the fourteenth chapter of the Fourth Gospel.

“The hope of the return of Christ to take the saints to heaven is presented in John 14 as an imminent hope. There is no teaching of any intervening event. The prospect of being taken to heaven at the coming of Christ is not qualified by description of any signs or prerequisite events. Here, as in other passages dealing with the coming of Christ for the church, the hope is presented as an imminent event. . . . For the most part, scriptural evidence for the imminency today is equivalent to proof of the pre-tribulation viewpoint.”<sup>3</sup>

Aside from the issue of imminence, there is an underlying principle to be considered from this text. That is, limiting the scope of purpose for the return of our Lord to a single paragraph, or a single chapter, or even a single book and author. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is multifaceted and multi-level in its scope and function. Yet underlying the gospel is still a deeper purpose and ultimate goal – what Paul calls *the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!* Every teaching is therefore built upon the underlying principles and goals. None stands alone or is complete in and of itself.

To discuss the subject of “imminence” we must first define it. Then we can proceed to review the scriptural contexts that are used to teach it.

The general definition of imminent:

- impending, expected, anticipated
- close, near, approaching
- likely to occur at any moment

A.T. Pierson’s definition is “Imminence is the combination of two conditions; certainty and uncertainty. By an imminent event we mean one which is certain to occur at some time, uncertain at what time.”<sup>4</sup>

Pierson’s definition is the best for our purposes because it clearly

defines the conditions for imminence to exist. When applied according to his definition, this eliminates vagueness:

- certainty that an event will occur
- uncertainty at what time that event will occur

Each scriptural teaching on the subject of imminence should then be able to be measured against these two clearly defined parameters to determine whether it supports imminence or not. We will review all the scriptural references in pre-tribulation rapture texts. However, we will not separate them from their context, either small or large, but will allow the Word of God to expand or contract their meaning.

## Notes

1. The Rapture Question - second edition, John F. Walvoord - Going to the Father's House (pg 70-71)
2. The Rapture Question - second edition, John F. Walvoord - A Ground for Comfort (pg 74)
3. The Rapture Question - second edition, John F. Walvoord - No Intervening Events (pg 73)
4. Our Lord's Second Coming as a Motive to World-Wide Evangelism, Arthur T. Pierson



# Chapter 10 - What Does Scripture Say About the Imminent Return of Christ?

## Gospel of Mark

Let's begin by summarizing Mark 13. I suggest a full read of the chapter. Don't rely solely on my summary.

Mark 13:33-37

*Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.*

So looking to our definition of imminence – based on certainty of an event, but uncertainty to the time it occurs – these few scriptures satisfy both conditions:

- the owner of the house will return (certainty)
- you don't know when the master of the house returns (uncertainty)

But to see how this relates directly to the return of our Lord, we must review the context. The parable is a postscript to Jesus' answer to the question regarding signs and the fulfillment of all things (verses 3-4).

The admonition to “watch” in verse 33 is in response to verse 32,

where we are told – *concerning that day and that hour, no man knows, . . . except the Father*. So what day and hour is being spoken of? Verse 26 and 27 tell us: *And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, . . .*

Following that is another analogy they can relate to (verse 28): *From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near.*

So how is that parable and the latter one about the house owner to be applied to the context of the message? Verse 29 explains it for us: *So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors!* (NKJV)

See what things happen? Those things described in verses 5-27. What is near, even at the door? What they asked for in verse 4 – *the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished*. And who is coming to complete all these things? Jesus Christ.

So these scriptures, which speak clearly about imminence, do so in the context of numerous signs that Christ himself said would occur before his return is seen in the clouds, when all these things are fulfilled. So any who attempt to teach that you can't have imminence with preceding events contradict Christ himself. Let's continue and see if this holds true.

## Gospel of Matthew

Matthew 24:42-46

*Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*

*Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.*

Let's summarize the context of Matthew 24.

- Be alert; you do not know the hour your Lord comes
- You should be ready, the Son of Man will come at a time you do not expect him
- Who is faithful, such that when the Lord comes, he finds him doing the work he gave them
- Blessed is that servant; he will be appointed over all

Is there certainty? – your Lord will come, the Son of Man will come

Is there uncertainty? – you do not know at what hour, at an hour you do not expect him

Again, like Mark 13, this is only the post-text to Christ's outline of the answer to their question in verse 3. And again we see verse 36 – *concerning that day and hour no one knows . . . but the Father only.*

So the day and hour being spoken of? Verse 30-31: *Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds . . .*

And again Matthew recites the same fig tree analogy we found in Mark, followed by verse 33: *so you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!* (NKJV)

So again, Matthew's account is a similar example of imminence to what we saw in Mark. And like the passages in Mark, the context of this imminence includes the full scope of events preceding and surrounding the return of the Lord.



Note also that Matthew's account also included the uncertainty as it was framed in Luke 12; the uncertainty is related to an expectation – or more accurately – a lack of expectancy on the part of those who fail to remain faithful all the way to the end.

*Matthew 25:13 – Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.*

Though the wording is similar to portions of the other scriptures we've seen thus far, it is incomplete. It contains the uncertainty, but lacks the certainty. To see if the certainty exists we must review the preceding text – the parable of the ten virgins (vs 1-12).

- Subject is the kingdom of heaven – likened to 10 virgins preparing to meet the bridegroom
- 5 were wise and prepared
- 5 were foolish and unprepared
- The bridegroom came – while the unprepared virgins were finally getting prepared, as though they were caught off-guard
- The foolish and unprepared virgins were not included in the marriage feast
- The wise and prepared virgins entered in with the bridegroom

Now there might be hidden meaning in this parable, especially in relation to similarities of Christ as the bridegroom and the church as the bride. Except note one major point – the ten virgins are not the bride, they accompany the bride.

So a simple reading gives the characteristics of the two sets of virgins; prepared and unprepared. And we do see the certainty we're looking for in verse 10 – the bridegroom came. So within the parable there is imminency. But what is the subject of the parable? The kingdom of heaven (vs 1). And what was the context of the preceding chapter that also had references to imminency and the uncertainty (Matthew 24:33,36,42,44,50, 25:13)? Being a faithful servant, doing the work assigned to us, and in so doing – be prepared for the master when he does return. Because he will return (certainty), as

he pointed out in chapter 24, amidst all these preceding events, and the sign of his coming doesn't mean there isn't imminency (uncertainty). There is. We just saw several examples within the two chapters.

The one example of uncertainty we haven't yet noticed is in Matthew chapter 24.

Matthew 24:21-22

*For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world . . . And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.*

Here's the uncertainty – those days will be shortened. But how and by what? The return of our Lord and Savior. How can we know for certain? He describes the circumstances surrounding his return – which is what the disciples were asking about in the first place (verse 3). Review the remaining verses up through verses 33 and 36.

- Don't believe any that say “here” or “there” is the Christ
- False Christs and lying prophets will deceive with signs and wonders
- His disciples, and by extension us, are warned in advance
- Don't believe those claiming special knowledge about the return of Christ
- The return of Christ will be obvious, in the sky, for all to see him coming in power and great glory
- His return comes immediately after the suffering of those days – because it's his return that cuts short the suffering of those days – of which no man knows the day or the hour

So Matthew, Mark, and Luke each record the imminence surrounding our Lord's return within the context of all these events, including the Great Tribulation. So imminence can't be destroyed by these preceding events described by our Lord leading up to his

return – they are a core part of what makes that imminent return necessary.

In the context of these depictions of our Lord's discourse concerning the certainty of his return, he outlines all the events to precede it so that we can be aware (Matthew 24:32-33). And all of this can be seen by simply letting the scriptures guide us. No special interpretation is needed – the scriptures do that for us. We need only to accept what's given without preconceived ideas.

But we're not finished. There are many more scriptures that infer imminence, and we must review all of them if we're to understand the subject fully.

## Gospel of Luke

*Luke 12:40 – You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*

Is there certainty? – the Son of Man will come

Is there uncertainty? – in that very hour which you do not expect

What's unique here is that the uncertainty is not based on a segment or unit of time, but on an expectation instead. Within the context of the previous verses in chapter 12, there are numerous indicators to the subject being addressed:

- Focus – keep your focus on the things of God
- Do not be anxious – God knows that you need these things
- Where your treasure is – there your heart is
- Continue the focus – keep the right priorities

If we lose focus and our priorities shift to things of the world instead of things of God, being out of touch with the things of God sets us up to not expect him – regardless of when he actually comes.

Luke 21:36 (ESV)

*But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.*

(NKJV)

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

Does this verse contain the certainty and uncertainty we're looking for if it is to support imminency? One could say that the phrase – *stand before the Son of Man* represents certainty. But unfortunately there is not a reference to time or expectation of his return (the uncertainty), so this verse doesn't support imminency.

What makes this verse popular for the imminence argument is the use of the word *escape*. This is why I have shown another translation. If we look at the context of this chapter, we'll see this is Luke's version of Christ's discourse about the last days preceding his return. Let's review some of the previous verses (Luke 21:25-35):

- Signs in the sun, moon, and stars
- Upheaval (distress and confusion) that takes life out of men because of fear of what is coming – seeing the powers of the universe shaken
- They will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with a large army and great glory
- When these things begin to happen have courage – your salvation is at hand
- Parable of the fig tree to know that summer is near
- When we see these things happen, we know the kingdom of God is near
- Take heed to yourselves
  - Don't become heavy-hearted by extravagance
  - Don't become heavy-hearted by drunkenness
  - Don't become heavy-hearted by worries of this world

- Why not? Or that day will come upon you suddenly
- It will come like a down-pour upon all and entrap them

So how is it that the verse we're reviewing is after "*all these things*" being described? Verse 28 says we are to have courage at this time, because our salvation is at hand. And what time is that? Verse 27 answers – *they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud*.

Verse 34 shows that we are to prepare ourselves by staying focused on the things of God and not the things of the world. It is only if we get caught up in the things of the world or surrender to the darkness will that day come upon us suddenly.

As we can see, verse 36 doesn't offer the escape from all this as some might imagine. This escape is by remaining faithful and focused on our Lord through the turbulence that will be in the world. How can we have courage in the midst of the upheaval? Because we'll be expecting the revealing of our Lord and the salvation he brings with him.

## Acts of the Apostles

*Acts 1:7 – He said to them, it is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.*

So by applying our test for certainty and uncertainty, we can see that this verse contains the uncertainty – *not for you to know the time or times*, but this verse lacks the certainty. To find that we must back up to verse 6:

*So when they had come together, they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*

In this case the certainty isn't related directly to the return of our Lord, but it is focused on the restoration of Israel. So between these two verses we have evidence of imminence, but unfortunately the

subject has nothing to do with our rapture or even the return of Christ, but with the restoration of Israel.

It's worth noting that the restoration of Israel was the expectation of the Jews of that day. There are numerous examples; as subtle as Peter cutting off a soldier's ear or as extreme as Judas turning Christ over to the religious authorities. This is noteworthy because it can be an underlying motivation and expectation that affects what they perceive to hear and therefore communicate to others.

## Letter to the Romans

In Romans, Paul outlines a more mature expectation and the hope it is based upon.

Romans 8:18-23

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons (vs 15), the redemption of our bodies.*

These verses look to certainty on a few different points:

- The glory which shall be revealed in humanity. This is intended to serve as a motivator.
- Humanity shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. The work of God is bringing his children into his new creation.

- The salvation of our bodies. This is a vital step for entrance into the new heavens and new earth, and it only comes through acceptance and surrender to Christ.

Unfortunately there is no clear uncertainty specified in the form of time, and only a vague implication of one in verse 32 – *wait eagerly for adoption*. We must conclude that these verses do not support the topic of imminence.

Let's review another example in Romans 13.

Romans 13:12-13

*The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.*

Observations:

- Now is the time we should wake from our sleep, since our salvation is closer now than when we first believed
- Night (darkness) is past; the day (light) is at hand. Put on the armor of light

In these two verses there is only the slightest hint to either certainty or uncertainty. In verse 12 the phrase – *the day is at hand* isn't a reference to our salvation mentioned in the previous verse. It's a reference to *the hour has come for you to wake from sleep*. The comparison in verse 12 is between darkness and light. The night is equivalent to darkness, and the day is equivalent to light. That's the reason for the statement – *put on the armor of light*.

This is further contrasted in verse 13.

- Walk decently in the light
- Not in clamor, drunkenness, immorality, envy or strife (darkness)

Here again is another verse that doesn't say what some would imply regarding imminence.

## Letter to the Corinthians

1 Corinthians 1:7 – *so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Again, no clear support for imminence here. There is a weak certainty when referring to the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, but an even weaker uncertainty in – *wait for*.

There is additional clarity though that brings this verse to fullness when it's combined with verse 8: *who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

One can understand from a dispensational perspective how verse 8 does not help their cause. It supports the teaching of previous scriptures (Luke 21) that Christ will be our strength through to the end of all (including the tribulation).

Next is 1 Corinthians 15. This entire chapter should be read with care, though our focus and discussion is around a few verses near the end. I would also suggest the aid of a commentary if one wants to glean the full impact of the chapter's context. For it is no less than the fundamental and essential part of the gospel – the resurrection of the dead.

So we find this chapter is full of certainty. That is its purpose; to communicate the certainty and necessity of the resurrection to the gospel message and to its role as the assurance of a future for all those who trust in God and believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. To complete the characteristic of imminence we then seek the uncertainty. This will be difficult since the author's purpose was quite the opposite. Yet there are a couple of hints that may render uncertainty.



1 Corinthians 15:22-26

*For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive, but every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward those who belong to Christ at his coming. Then will come the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. And the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.*

If there is any certainty relating to our Lord's return here it resides in the phrase – Christ at his coming. Although the uncertainty (at what time that event will occur) is not explicitly repeated here, we know from previous scriptures (Matthew, Mark, Luke) that the timing of his return is unknown – concerning that day and hour no man knows . . . except the Father (Matthew 24:36).

Another verse worth investigating in 1 Corinthians is verse 52.

*1 Corinthians 15:52 – In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed.*

In this verse the *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye* denotes a rate of time, not a specific time (at which something will occur). The rate at which *the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed* is so rapid it is almost unmeasurable.

In this case though we are given a clue as to when it will occur – *for the trumpet shall sound*. We may recall from our reading of Matthew, Mark, and Luke that each recorded Christ's return and the events surrounding it with a trumpet blast (Matthew 24:31).

So what's detailed in 1 Corinthians 15 is the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the change of those (chosen) believers still alive at his return, responding (involuntarily) to the trumpet blast. We can see then that 1 Corinthians 15 does address our change and connects

with the imminent return of our Lord as described in detail in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

## Letter to the Philippians

Philippians 3:20-21

*But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

Here in Philippians, the certainty is clearly proclaimed. As the author compares the fruits of the earthly with those of the Godly, he concludes with the consummation of our labors in Christ – our salvation and the transformation to his likeness in glory. For the earthly look to earthly things, whereby there is no salvation, only death. But we look to our Lord and Savior, who has overcome death and will subdue all things, including death, to himself.

The paragraph continues with an admonition to continue in such labors (Philippians 4:1): *Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.*

The lack of uncertainty then leaves this scripture unable to support imminence, though it abounds in certainty.

Philippians 4:5 – *Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.*

Some would like to claim this text, *the Lord is at hand*, is the uncertainty for the previous certainty declared earlier in Philippians 3:20-21. It is hardly a claim that can be made on solid grounds. In the context of this and the previous chapter, the author contrasts the pride and boasts of the flesh against those boasts which are ours, and equally his, in Christ Jesus. That Christ is at hand, or near, or even in the midst of them, equally translate and convey the message

that our conduct ought to be the same as if in the presence of the Lord. He continues this intention in verses 6-9, instructing us in the form of our conduct and its underlying motive.

Is there an expectation of some in the church that their Lord is ever present, ever watching, ever interceding on behalf of his chosen ones? Certainly! And it's fitting for one to motivate himself even with the expectancy that his return is imminent – certain to occur, but uncertain as to when. Yet so far we have seen that that imminent return exists within the context of those numerous events that are to precede our Lord's appearing.

## Letter to the Colossians

Colossians 3:4 – *When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

Here again we see a clear proclamation of certainty – *then you also will appear with him in glory*. In fact verses 1-3 also speak to this certainty, for the author testifies that (in certainty) we are already risen with Christ; we merely await the final transformation. To the author, this is the condition of one whose belief, trust, and life are in our Lord Jesus Christ, because in Christ is the assurance and fulfillment of all promises.

Though the certainty is clarified, the uncertainty remains by reference only – *Christ who is your life appears*. For the timing of that appearance, we need to revert to the details in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, since no other details are offered here.

## Letters to the Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

*... and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living*

*and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

Here Paul expresses his love for the Thessalonians and their sincere repentance and in seeing the fruit of the gospel of God in their lives. Here as in verse 19 of chapter 2, Paul expresses his hope for and with them as – *For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?*

Now verse 10 clarifies a characteristic of salvation in Christ, in that God did not appoint us to wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10), but that we should live together with him. In this assertion there is certainty, but it lacks any uncertainty as to when this wrath will come. Verse 2:19 is actually more closely related to imminence than is 1:10. Our presence with him is the certainty, and when he comes infers the uncertainty. Yet here again we are forced, for lack of any other description of his return, to rely on that given in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

The following verses in 1 Thessalonians must be looked at together, as one. Though they bridge two chapters they comprise a single paragraph and are connected contextually. I'll review them here.

#### 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

- We are not to grieve over our dead in the same way as those with no hope
- If we trust in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we must know that God will bring those who've died with him (when he returns)
- Those who remain until the coming of our Lord will not precede those who have died
- Our Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God
- Those who died in Christ will rise first
- We who are alive and remain shall be changed and caught up

together with them in the clouds

- Together we meet our Lord in the air, and so we will continue with him
- These words are to comfort us

#### 1 Thessalonians 5:2-10

- The day of our Lord comes like a thief in the night
- The world shall claim peace and safety
- But sudden destruction shall come upon them, and they will not escape
- That day will overtake them as a thief because they are in darkness
- We are children of the light and day, so that day will not overtake us as a thief
- We are to be sober, not slothful
- We are to be faithful and not drunkard
- We are to live for the hope of our salvation
- God did not appoint us to wrath
- God appointed us to salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us
- Whether we are awake (alive) or asleep (dead), we'll live together with him when he returns

There is much certainty proclaimed in this paragraph, so let's identify the many examples provided:

- God will bring with Christ those who have died in him (vs 14)
- Our Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout (vs 16)
- Those who died in Christ will rise first (vs 16)
- Those alive will be caught up together with them (vs 17)
- The day of our Lord comes as a thief in the night upon those in darkness (5:2,4)
- The day of our Lord does not come as a thief in the night upon the children of light (5:4-5)
- God has appointed us to salvation, not to wrath (vs 5:9)

Verse 14 is consistent with that spoken in the Fourth Gospel 6:39-40, that God desires Christ should not lose any of those he has given him, but that he should raise them up on the last day.

In these verses the uncertainty, initially mentioned for those in darkness, is removed by the author, who clarifies that we, who are the children of light and the day, will not be overtaken by the appearance of that day – thereby removing the uncertainty for us. How is it that we are not overtaken? Is it because we've been removed from the scene? No, it clearly states why those in the light are not overtaken:

- We are sober, not slothful
- We are faithful, not drunkards
- We are living for the hope of our salvation – which we've been appointed to

Before reviewing 2 Thessalonians 2, it is necessary to at least highlight some of the points the author brings out in the previous chapter. In chapter one he introduces the subject that is further expanded in chapter two. Note a few of the highlights:

## 2 Thessalonians 1

- Their suffering was considered a righteous act because of their faith and patience
- To those oppressed he grants peace when our Lord Jesus Christ appears
- At which time he will avenge with flaming fire those who know not God nor acknowledge the gospel of our Lord
- He comes to be glorified by his saints and to work wonders among his faithful ones – which includes the Thessalonians

Let's move then into chapter 2 and outline the key points surrounding the topic in verse 1 – *concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him.*

## 2 Thessalonians 2

- Do not be hastily excited or troubled
- Let no one deceive you
- That day shall not come without preceding events
  - a rebellion
  - the Man of Sin will be revealed as the Son of Perdition
- There is an obstacle that prevents him from being revealed until his time

Although some preceding events are noted, timing is not the focus – so there is no direct uncertainty mentioned in this text. However, it's important to note that uncertainty is part of what the author is addressing. Obviously the Thessalonians were anxious (hastily excited and troubled) about the day of our Lord having passed. He is attempting to put that anxiety into context by citing some details regarding events which precede the appearing of our Lord. By comparing these with the description of events already provided in other accounts, we can begin to understand the full context.

2 Thessalonians 2	Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21
Do not be deceived	Let no man deceive you
A rebellion	A great many are misled and deceived Much hate and betrayal of one another
Man of Sin revealed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• opposes God</li> <li>• exalts himself above all gods</li> <li>• sits as god in the temple of God</li> <li>• attempts to appear as god</li> </ul>	
Man of Sin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the work of Satan</li> <li>• with all power and false signs and wonders</li> <li>• with all wicked deception for those who are perishing</li> </ul>	Many will say, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' Do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

How does Paul finish the discourse in 2 Thessalonians 2?

- Brothers beloved by the Lord, chosen by God as the firstfruits to be saved
- He called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ
- So then, brothers, stand firm

Here again is another example that even though prior events are outlined before the appearing of our Lord and our gathering together with him, this in no way removes the uncertainty we've already established earlier – that Christ will cut short those days for the sake of his elect, his chosen ones.

## Letter to Timothy

1 Timothy 6:14-15

*to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.*

The charge being spoken of is to flee the desires of the world, riches, and the resulting destruction awaiting those who covet money. The expectation presented by the author is that we continue in contentment (vs 6) and fight the good fight until the appearing of our Lord. In that we have certainty. The uncertainty exists in that – *which he will display at the proper time.*

Although this is an example of imminence, there is no additional or clarifying details surrounding his appearance that would alter our current findings. The author continues this certainty in verse 8 of 2 Timothy 4 where his focus is clearly on the day of the Lord: *Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*



# Letter to the Hebrews

Hebrews 9:28 – so Christ, *having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.*

The gospel in simple and clear terms. Note that the certainty revolves around his appearing when he returns – for it is in that appearing that salvation awaits for those who look for him to return. This is the very motivation behind his appearance recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This speaks to certainty, but lacks any reference to uncertainty.

Hebrews 10:24-25

*And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

The expectation of some is that the phrase *see the day drawing near* refers to the day of our Lord's return. That could certainly be the case, and if so, would also add support to the idea that there can be foreknowledge of events that lead up to an imminent activity – namely the return of our Lord. How else can one see that day approaching? This contradicts the imminency argument requiring no preceding events.

However, since the author fails to mention our Lord's return anywhere in the previous verses of this chapter, it's difficult to apply that meaning unless we look back to the end of chapter 9. There the author clearly points out that Christ *will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.* This coincides with his plans to rescue his faithful elect away from their enemy during the time of Satan's wrath. This concept is reinforced further in chapter 10, where the author speaks of the time coming when *his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.* The time

for the subjection of Christ's enemies is clearly after he appears a second time in preparation to establish his kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:23-25).

By themselves these verses address neither the certainty of Christ's return nor the uncertainty as to when he will return.

*Hebrews 10:37 – Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay.*

As a proof-text this scripture rings lightly of imminency with certainty and only implied uncertainty. This uncertainty, though, focuses on an expectation and not on a specific time that is unknown. The reasons for this become clear when put into context with the previous and subsequent verses. The issue being addressed is back-sliding (vs 26-39). The author's charge is to not lose confidence, remember what you've already struggled through, and remain patient. And as a final form of motivation he reminds them that our Lord will return, and he won't delay – both of which are certainties. He actually doesn't address the time factor, because that's not the point. It's like we would say today to motivate someone – life is short; don't waste it.

## Letter of James

James 5:7-9

*Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.*

The certainty reflected here is both direct and indirect. Direct in that *the coming of the Lord is at hand* and indirect in that *the Judge*

is *standing at the door*. In both cases though, uncertainty is lacking. This is fitting with the context. The author is contrasting those who live outside the will of God (vs 4:13-5:6) with the brethren. Even though we are condemned and murdered by such as these – we do not resist but remain patient and endure quietly. Our motivation to endure quietly is due to the certainty that our Lord is coming. That's our comfort.

Verse 9 is poorly rendered in some translations. For the brethren, a reminder is needed that they are not to complain against each other, since our judge (the Lord) is ever present – even at the door – and will hold us accountable for our treatment of one another. The focus here is patient, quiet enduring, even with one another. It is further encouraged in the following verses, with examples from the prophets and Job, together with the fruit of that patience.

## Letter of Peter

1 Peter 1:6-7,13

*In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

*Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

This whole chapter is rich with certainty, reminding the brethren the foundational gospel that is brought to them and the hope and assurance it means for those who dwell in the Spirit of God's grace and mercy. Again, all that awaits us at his appearing – glory, honor, and praise, along with the salvation of our souls. This is motivation

for our mindful, reverent, and holy lives which we are to conduct ourselves in *during the time of our sojourning here*.

The only uncertainty to be found here comes from our reference to the established details of our Lord's return in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and the awareness that none but the Father knows the day and the hour it will occur. This is reflected again in 1 Peter 4:7 in that the end of all things approaches (it's certain), so be devout and pray and have love for one another.

## Letter of John

1 John 2:28-3:2

*And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.*

*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*

Again we see a richness of certainty as is fitting for the context. Here John is contrasting the doctrines of the false Christ with those of our Lord and Savior. And our motivation is, in part, the desire to share in the likeness of our Lord at his appearing. But yet again there is a noticeable lack of uncertainty as to the time of that appearing. So we reference back to what Matthew, Mark, and Luke have established and that which has become evident through many scriptures thus far.

We see the same encouragement in Jude 21 – that we keep ourselves

in the love of God – looking (always) for the mercy of our Lord and the eternal life he brings us. This needs to be our constant motivation. We are reminded regularly in these scriptures of the certainty of our Lord's return – which we know has an uncertainty about it. Yet we are also reminded of our need to be faithful to the end, steadfast in doing whatever work each was called to do, and to hope in the future our Lord has prepared for us; either in death and resurrection or in transformation at his appearing. This is worthwhile motivation indeed.

The remaining scriptures addressing imminence are in Revelation, but I will save those for a later chapter. There are also many other scriptures about our Lord's return that were not on the list of those supporting imminence. Many of these were covered in Section 3, where I expanded the many purposes surrounding our Lord's return.

## Summary and Conclusion

So in the final question regarding the basis for imminency in the scriptures concerning the return of our Lord, we can see there are only a few definitive examples. Of the many scriptures used to prove imminence, many didn't fit the definition – lacking either certainty or uncertainty.

In those scriptures that do speak to certainty and uncertainty, it's worth noting that the increment of time referenced as uncertain was generally a day or less (Mark 13:33-37; Matthew 24:42-46; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:10; 2 Thessalonians 2; 1 Timothy 6:14-15). This limited scope of uncertainty was also expressed as a day or less in several references that didn't satisfy the imminence test (Luke 12:40; Matthew 24:22-23; 25:13). The obvious point from these observations is that they fit within the scope of time which Christ himself claimed would be uncertain – *But concerning that **day** and **hour** no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.*

A primary argument added to the requirement of imminency is that no preceding event can be involved – otherwise the uncertainty vanishes. However, what is often overlooked is that nowhere in scripture is the return of our Lord so defined or timed so as to remove that uncertainty. Christ himself repeatedly lays out the circumstances associated with his return so that we're not ill-prepared when it comes.

The answer that comes from the pre-tribulation rapture perspective is that if our rapture (or gathering together with Christ) comes after the Great Tribulation, the preceding events described in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Revelation all destroy that uncertainty. Revelation establishes and supports the timing of the Great Tribulation – the last 3 ½ years when the beast power rules. That being the case, one could argue, uncertainty vanishes because now you can time precisely, to the day at least, when Christ will appear; at the end of the 1260 days – yes? No, not according to scripture and the underlying will of God.

Read again Matthew 24:22 and Mark 13:20:

- *And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.*
- *And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days.*

These scriptures clarify and sustain the imminence being sought regarding the return of our Lord. Though there are scriptures defining the Great Tribulation events and timing – God will override that timing and cut the last 1260 days short. There's the imminency!

This is clarified even further by confirming the uncertainty in later verses of Matthew 24 and Mark 13. Likewise this coincides with Paul's description of our Lord's return in 2 Thessalonians 2 and the events that precede it.

Mark 13:29-32 – *So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*

Matthew 24:33-36 – *So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.*

So there you have it. A fundamental and essential element of the pretribulation rapture doesn't stand up to scrutiny even by its own definition of imminence. Scripture supports and confirms the rapture occurs at a time of God's choosing in the last days of the Great Tribulation at the appearing of our Lord in the clouds of the sky. Look up – your salvation is at hand.

# Chapter II - The Rapture in the Book of Revelation

It has already been shown that the Book of Revelation to John does in fact make reference to the body of believers as it describes the many varied events our Lord oversees to complete his work of preparing a kingdom for his Father. Not only does the Book of Revelation cover a range of time periods, it also affects various groups of people in separate and distinct ways. An overview of this was provided in chapter three.

The primary basis for the pretribulationist view of the Book of Revelation appears to come from the fact that the rapture is not mentioned in the book, indicating to them why – the rapture has already occurred. Walvoord's take on this same reasoning<sup>1</sup> is indicated below.

“Posttribulationists attempt to turn the argument against the pretribulationists by saying that if there were a pretribulation Rapture, it ought to be stated in the Book of Revelation. The opposite, rather, is the truth. If, as a matter of fact, the Rapture has taken place earlier before the Great Tribulation ever comes upon the earth, then there would be no need to discuss the Rapture in the sequence of later events. If, on the other hand, the Rapture is a part of the events of the Second Coming, the strange absence of any mention of it certainly is a devastating blow to posttribulationists.”

Walvoord goes on to say that some force for the tribulation rapture argument comes from how the book is interpreted.

“If, however, consideration be given to those who interpret the book from the premillennial standpoint and adopt the



view that from chapters 4 to 18 the Book of Revelation is dealing with events that are still future and related to the years immediately preceding the second coming of Christ, then a discussion of the various passages has some force.”

The idea that there would be no need for the Book of Revelation to discuss the rapture would indeed make sense if it weren't mentioned, but as we have shown repeatedly, it is mentioned by virtue of the result on those who've *washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb* (Revelation 7:9-17). It's just not mentioned in the way that the pretribulationists expect. They prefer to trust in the argument from silence (in thinking that the rapture is not mentioned) rather than to let the scriptures interpret themselves. This approach is more challenging as it requires one to let go of any preconceived suppositions or expectations and let scripture reveal itself.

In addition, a careful reading of Revelation 4-18 indicates events that reach backward in time (with regard to our Lord's return) long before the Great Tribulation occurs. Recall that in Revelation 1, John is told to write the things he **has seen, now sees**, and those **yet future** (with respect to John's point in time) (Revelation 1:19). One such event is recorded in Revelation 5. This is an event that sounds remarkably like a coronation, the coronation of the Lamb of God for his victory over sin and the world. Why would one assume that because the coronation is shown to John and recorded in the Book of Revelation it must therefore occur some time in the future? This viewpoint contradicts the claims of many New Testament authors who put our Lord at the right hand of God with all authority and power. Did Christ not fulfill all that was required of him for redemption and overcoming heavenly powers by the time he ascended into heaven?

Luke 22:69 – Christ himself asserts *But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.*

Acts 2:32-36; 5:30-31 – This Jesus God has raised from the

dead and is exalted at the right hand of God, being made both Lord and Christ.

Hebrews 1:1-4

*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*

Likewise, as was shown in Section III, the rapture (the results of which are described in Revelation 7) is directly connected with the physical return of our Lord to the earth as recorded in Revelation 19. The two events, one for the rewarding of his faithful, and the other for the establishment of his kingdom, are separated in scripture only by the first six trumpets of our Lord's wrath. For the pretribulationists, this is unacceptable, since their presupposition requires the rapture to occur before the Great Tribulation even begins. As a reminder, this is the only logical conclusion for them under the following circumstances:

- Assigning the Great Tribulation to be the same period of time as the Day of the Lord they see only one wrath.
- Overlooking the many references to the body of believers in the Book of Revelation and throughout the New Testament, their presuppositions overlook the unity of the body of believers as intended by Christ.
- Relying on the dispensational model and its interpretation, which divides the work of the Mosaic covenant from that of the new Covenant in Christ, they fail to see the relationship of the two as revealed in the mystery of God in Jesus Christ. More on this in the next section.

Within this book the groundwork has been laid which clearly challenges the dispensational model and pretribulation views on three of the four claims addressed so far. Let's continue, however, to review those specific topics in the Book of Revelation which claim to support the pretribulation viewpoint and see if scripture has more to reveal on the topic.

## Revelation 2:25

This scripture is claimed to suggest that *hold fast what you have until I come* could be interpreted as a reference to the pretribulation rapture. I suggest that we broaden the context slightly to see how the author is applying this statement.

Revelation 2:24-28

*But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. **Only hold fast what you have until I come.** The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. And I will give him the morning star.*

Christ's judgment of the congregation of Thyatira can be summarized as one which is growing in faith, love, patience, and service, yet containing those who lead others into idolatry and sexual immorality, and fail to repent. The context offers no specific support for the rapture regardless of when one claims it is to occur, and it certainly fails the test for imminence.

*Hold fast what you have till I come* implies an effort on the part of those remaining until the Lord returns. If we broaden our contextual scope to all seven congregations, we can see that for

some it means effort as the result of repentance (Revelation 2:5, 16, 21-23). For others it means holding fast to his name (Revelation 2:13), while others extend effort to resist those who would deceive them and thereby steal their crown (Revelation 3:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3; 2 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:5-7; 2 John 1:7-8).

In addition to holding fast is the greater context of conquering expressed to each of the seven congregations. This too requires effort, focus on, and faith in, the Lord. Faithfulness and diligence are only developed through struggle. In this case, struggling through the opposition. The rewards for such diligence and faithfulness are very desirable:

- To eat from the Tree of Life (2:7b)
- To be glorified and overcome the second death (2:11b; 20:6)
- To eat of the hidden manna and receive a special name (2:17b)
- To be granted positions of authority over the nations and to rule with Christ in his earthly kingdom (2:26-27; 5:9-10)
- To be clothed in white and our name remains in the book of life (3:5)
- To be made a pillar in the temple of God (3:12; 21:9-14)
- To sit upon and share the throne of our Lord (3:21)

## Revelation 3:10-11

The judgment Christ is making is to the angel of the Philadelphia congregation. Theirs is mostly a positive assessment.

Revelation 3:10-11

*Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.*

Here Walvoord sees Christ's claim to keep you from the hour of trial as a clear reference to the rapture, in that Christ is coming for

the church to deliver them from wrath before the Great Tribulation begins. Keep in mind this conclusion is only arrived at from these three suppositions:

- A. That the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord occur at the same time
- B. That protection from God's wrath means protection from all wrath
- C. The Hour of Trial is the Great Tribulation

Let's address each of these from the context of what's been shown thus far and expand into a larger context as needed.

- A. If one assumes that the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord are the same, then being saved from God's wrath is essentially the same as being saved from Satan's wrath. However, in section two I've outlined clearly how scripture shows these to be two distinct and separate periods; Satan's wrath to test God's called, chosen, and faithful, and God's wrath to correct the world and lead many to repentance. More on this in a moment.
- B. When distinguishing between the two periods of wrath, chapter one has already shown how scripture assures the faithful, who are reconciled to God, that they are exempt from his wrath. Through the reconciliation in Christ and continued repentance, his work in us can be completed and the purpose for God's corrective wrath is no longer relevant. The exceptions we're shown in five of the seven congregations are due to a failure to repent.

It is important to understand the different purposes and focus of Satan's wrath from God's perspective. One purpose is intended to prove the faithfulness of God's called and chosen, his elect.

- Will they remain faithful until the end? (Hebrews 12:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 1:9-12; Matthew 24:12-13; 1 Corinthians 10:13)
- Will they continue as children of the light, or return to the dark? (Philippians 2:14-16; Ephesians 5:5-10; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10)
- Will they love the work that Christ is doing in them more than their own lives? (1 Peter 1:3-9; James 1:12-13; Fourth Gospel 6:27-29; 12:24-26; Mark 8:34-36; Revelation 2:25; 3:11)

These are the fruits that Christ will harvest from his faithful followers when he appears in the clouds to cut short Satan's wrath against them. As noted earlier, the rewards for bearing such fruit are abundant.

- C. While the Great Tribulation can certainly be called an hour of trial, especially for the elect, the question remains whether it is *the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth*, spoken of here.

A larger context for understanding these verses comes from the vision and the vision-giver who is revealing the things that have been, the things that are (at the time the vision was received), and those things yet to come (Revelation 1:19).

The perspective of the vision is a supernatural one and involves an assessment of the seven angels (not men) who've been given oversight of these seven Gentile congregations. Because the seven angels appear to have oversight, the assessment is addressed to each of them (Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14).

Though these seven Gentile congregations do not represent the entirety of the body of Christ, together they do represent a subset of the body being overseen by the seven angels which are in Christ's right hand (Revelation 1:16, 20). Again, a

supernatural perspective. It's reasonable therefore to expect that the oversight of these seven angels continues to this day.

The group of people being addressed are obviously those believers who've been called to repentance and into the light of Christ. These are to be the firstfruits of our Lord's salvation. This assessment by the High Priest of the church is an expression of his righteous judgment over it. It includes praise, warning, encouragement, promises, and a repeated call to continued repentance. The subject of continued repentance is raised eight times within these seven church judgments. As every faithful Christian knows, repentance is not a one-time event, but an ongoing process of spiritual maturation. It is also a theme that reaches throughout the Book of Revelation and goes mostly unnoticed. That's a story for another time.

When we look at the assessment of the congregation at Philadelphia, we'll notice that it is one of two churches where further repentance is not required, the other being Smyrna. One should not conclude that there is no need for further repentance, but that the regular practice of repentance (a teachable and humble heart) is an ongoing part of their growth and resulting praise.

The key characteristic of the Philadelphia congregation is that even though they possess little power, they've kept the Lord's word and have not denied his name (vs 8). It is precisely for this reason that the Lord makes the promise to keep them from the hour of trial.

- You have kept my word and not denied my name (vs 8)
- You have kept my word about patient endurance (quietly enduring)
- I will keep you from the hour of trial (vs 10)
- I am coming soon (vs 11)

So how can we know with any certainty what period of time this hour of trial is referring to? The clarification comes from the surrounding context.

*Revelation 3:9 – Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie – behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. (Fourth Gospel 17:21b, 23b)*

*Revelation 3:12 – The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.*

Both of these promises will only be fulfilled in their entirety after Christ has returned with power and authority – his second coming. It is at his second coming when the faithful are redeemed from the earth; the dead rising first, then those alive at the time are changed. Those kept from the hour of trial are those being redeemed. These are the elect whom the Lord returns for to cut short their tribulation.

The logical and reasonable conclusion then is that the hour of trial occurs after the Lord returns and after he has redeemed his faithful from the earth. This is consistent with the unfiltered view of scripture we've seen thus far. Therefore, we can accurately conclude that the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth, is in fact the Day of the Lord. It is not referring to the Great Tribulation.

In addition, verse 11 applies further encouragement for this conclusion.

- *I am coming soon.* Encouragement for those patiently enduring the tribulation around them.
- *Hold fast what you have.* You've kept my word and my patience faithfully. Continue to do so until I return.



- Let no one steal away your crown. Remain faithful, humble, and teachable (the children of light). Let no one deceive you, thereby losing your promised place of authority.

Finally in verse 12 we're reminded, like those of the other congregations, the desirable rewards only go to those who conquer. However, ours is not a political or national conquering, it is a spiritual one; individually conquering the world through trust and faith in Christ our Lord. He will accomplish it in us. We need only stay focused, faithful, and in relationship with him.

## Revelation 5:9-10 and the 24 Elders

In his discussion of Revelation 5, Walvoord takes a balanced approach and recognizes the division among scholars and the controversy over the text relating to the 24 elders. He leaves it as an open matter, subject to further debate. I'll illustrate part of this controversy by showing two distinct translations.

Revelation 5:9-10 (ESV)

*And they sang a new song, saying,  
 "Worthy are you to take the scroll  
 and to open its seals,  
 for you were slain, and by your blood you **ransomed people** for  
 God  
 from every tribe and language and people and nation,  
 and you have **made them** a kingdom and priests to our God,  
 and **they shall reign** on the earth."*

Revelation 5:9-10 (KJV)

*And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the  
 book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and  
 hast **redeemed us** to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and  
 tongue, and people, and nation;*

*And hast **made us** unto our God kings and priests: and **we shall reign** on the earth.*

Many attempt to assign the identity of the 24 elders to resurrected humans, and do so based on these debatable and unresolved grammatical points. My suggestion is to move the discussion to a larger context. Any grammatical issues must be surrendered to a larger coherent and purposeful context. Let's begin by outlining the possible conclusions for the nature of the 24 elders.

There are countless interpretations as to the identity of the 24 elders. I will note some of them here:

- Heavenly beings and part of the council of Yahweh
- Representatives (resurrected humans) of the old and new covenants (12 from each)
- Representatives (resurrected humans) of the great and minor prophets
- The elders of the church at Jerusalem (resurrected humans)

For example, some look to Matthew 27:52-53 when the tombs were opened and a great many of the saints were resurrected at the death of Christ. It is claimed that this is the point when the 24 elders were resurrected to spiritual beings and would have ascended to heaven. However, a thorough reading of these verses indicates an alternate purpose.

Matthew 27:51-54

*And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"*

These resurrections were bodily in nature not spiritual. How can we conclude this?

- First, the scriptural context indicates “bodies” – their original living body – no special transformation is attributed to how they were raised. We are forced to conclude from what the author provides, these multiple resurrections were of the same nature as that performed for Lazarus; a resurrection to physical, mortal life. If the author had intended otherwise, surely he need only indicate the bodies were glorified, or the resurrection was one which leads to immortality. This is not the case.
- Second, it can not be established clearly from the text when the resurrections actually took place; at the time of his death or at the time of his resurrection. If the resurrections were to natural bodies as the text alone suggests, then the timing creates no contradiction with Christ’s glorified resurrection and his precedence in such things (Acts 26:22-23; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23; Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:4-5). If their resurrection was to spirit, as some suggest beyond the text, it would risk preceding Christ’s own resurrection unless it occurs after his resurrection – therefore not violating the divine claim that he is the first-born (firstfruits) of many brethren.

The distinction remains in that Christ’s resurrection was to eternal life (a glorified resurrection) whereas these saints appear (from the text) only to be resurrected to life (mortal life). This also retains the significance of promise for the future inheritance of the resurrected saints at Christ’s return to a resurrection like his; to eternal life (a glorified resurrection).

- Thirdly, they went into Jerusalem and appeared to a great many people. This only has value if they are among the faithful in Israel and contemporary with those currently living there. If they were resurrected saints of the past, who there would recognize them and could validate that they are who they claim? Only contemporary people would be in a position to return to Jerusalem and proclaim the reality of their

resurrection and its connection to the current event, and with that glorify God and Jesus Christ his son.

These resurrections achieve the same purpose of showing God's faithfulness toward fulfilling the promise of the kingdom to which Christ spoke on his behalf; God's power over death. Just as Christ himself demonstrated his power over death when raising Lazarus (Fourth Gospel 11:38-44), God would show not only the significance of Christ's death, by raising many from their graves, but also the faithfulness of his Son to submit to death on the cross. These acts serve to magnify what Jesus himself claimed; *For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will, and Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.* (Fourth Gospel 5:21, 25-26; 11:25)

Returning to Revelation 5, if John is among the one half of the group of 24 elders, being an apostle who was promised a throne, he would be looking upon his resurrected self as part of the group of 24. This might be acceptable, as far-fetched as it sounds, since this was a vision of the future, were it not for the following point.

Scripture establishes that Christ is the first to be resurrected (firstfruits) within the body of believers. No other resurrection to spirit has been shown in scripture until Christ returns. Unfortunately the 24 elders are present for the opening of the first six seals (of Revelation 6) prior to Christ's return in the sky at the sixth seal. They're also present in Revelation 4 when John is introduced to the throne of God, the four living creatures, and the 24 elders.

When looking at the conflicting evidence regarding the 24 elders, it can be very difficult to draw any sound conclusions, especially when our perspective is limited. Even John, who saw these events

firsthand, didn't clarify them as distinctively resurrected humans, but refers to them in the same context as other spiritual beings.

- Together with the four living creatures, the elders encircled the Lamb (Revelation 5:5-7)
- The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders all had harps and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people (5:8).
- Those who sang the new song were the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders (5:9-10).
- When the twenty-four elders worship God at the sound of the seventh trumpet, the reference to humanity is in the third person, not the first (Revelation 11:16-18). This is a glaring inconsistency to the pretribulationist's claim in Revelation 5:9-10.
- In Revelation 14 when the 144,000 are redeemed from the earth, they sing a new song and it's sung before the throne, the four living creatures, and the elders. If the elders were themselves redeemed from the earth, and partly representative of the twelve tribes of Israel, would they have not been included in learning the song? Keep in mind there is no connection implied or inferred between the new song mentioned here and the new song of Revelation 5:9-10. Their only commonality is that they're both new songs.

Most of the evidence appears to be in favor of the 24 elders as spirit beings serving on God's divine council. It is only the mention of their white robes and crowns that leads some to conclude, on that single piece of evidence, they are redeemed from humanity.

I've already stated my arguments for how and why I conclude they are angelic beings. I would now like to offer a purely speculative conclusion regarding the crowns and white robes. Continuing with a supernatural viewpoint, I begin by asking what do the crowns and white robes represent?

- The crowns represent positions of authority typical in

structures of government

- The white robes represent purity (holiness) and righteousness

When we observe the work that God is doing in and through Jesus Christ, we can see the outcome for the firstfruits of salvation results in their receiving an imperishable inheritance:

- A. Eternal life (immortality)
- B. The holiness and righteousness of Christ attributed to them
- C. Positions of authority and rulership along side Christ

Those are certainly desirable things to inherit. Just the one, eternal life, is greatly satisfying in itself. Let's continue this supernatural perspective a moment longer, and discard the idea that some want to cling to – that it's all about us (humanity). Although throughout scripture there are no direct indications of God's redemptive work for those in the angelic realm, there are indications that some will face a negative outcome to God's judgment of them (Matthew 25:41; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6). We're also told in scripture that at least some redeemed from humanity will be involved in the process of rendering judgment over portions of the angelic realm (1 Corinthians 6:2-3).

If we consider the spiritual work God is doing to elevate humanity to the divine realm (as co-heirs with Christ), is it that much of a stretch to consider he may be offering, or has offered, a similar role to some already possessing a spiritual nature? Perhaps the 24 elders represent those of the angelic realm to whom God has attributed the second (B) and third (C) elements of a similar inheritance to the one promised to us. They already possess the first element (A), by virtue of being created spirit beings. Or, are we left to assume that humanity is the only part of God's creation whose future is being worked out by his righteous judgment?

# Revelation 7

Another key clarification is necessary with regard to an article by McGee and his treatment of Revelation 7<sup>2</sup>. He mistakenly applies the sealing, which clearly occurs for the 144,000 of Israel, to the great multitude also. He claims two groups of the human family are sealed: Jews and Gentiles. This great multitude is referred to as Gentiles in order to show the absence of the church – and therefore the timing of their rapture, or removal from the earth, some time before the Great Tribulation.

First it's important to note that to follow the thinking that one can decide or define a condition by the absence of information is foolish at best. This is a technique evident in both McGee's and Walvoord's writings. There are an infinite range of elements that go unmentioned in the context of any writing. It's always the writer's intention to focus on those within the context and not on the infinite range of those not mentioned. How is one to know which of these infinite, unmentioned elements are intended to be applied unless the writer specifies them? Such thinking gets one lost quickly.

So to understand Revelation 7, we must step back and look at the context within which it lies. We've covered this partially in chapters seven and eight, so let's get an overview before getting into the details. This allows us to observe the bigger picture and ask some important questions.

First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
Great Tribulation	Heavenly signs	Christ appears in the heavens	Faithful are redeemed, 144,000 are sealed	Christ executes God's wrath upon the earth

The focus of this book has been to discover, as much as to show, how and why the appearance of Jesus Christ occurs when it does –

after the tribulation of the last days. More important is how these events fit into the work and will of God and his Christ. Here's the order of events as they appear to be laid out in scripture.

- First is the occurrence of the Great Tribulation in the final 3 1/2 years of the last days in which the beast power, the servant of Satan, reigns upon the earth.
- Second is the heavenly signs in the sun, moon, and stars, and the shaking of heaven and earth.
- This is followed by the appearance of Christ in the heavens with power and great glory.
- From that vantage point, he sends out his angelic messengers to gather his chosen faithful; those dead being resurrected first, followed by those remaining alive at the time. Also at this time, his angelic hosts are sent to seal the 144,000 descendants of Jacob (Israel) whom God has called. They will be an example to the world and to their fellow Israelites as the work of God progresses toward the kingdom.
- To subdue the seen and unseen rulers of the world, Jesus Christ will execute God's wrath upon a deceived and unrepentant world. This work concludes when he descends from the heavens with his faithful bride, arrayed in fine linen pure and white, on horses to battle with an army assembled by the beast power and the false prophet.

Taking the time to do this overview allows us to consider the relationship between these events and whether they fit with the work God has been doing and intends to do. Making those observations should raise some questions. How they are answered helps establish, or not, the congruence and consistency of what we're observing. Here are five that occurred to me:

- A. Is it consistent with the gospel that believers are to look for their salvation after the appearance of Christ in the heavens when he reveals himself to the world?
- B. Is it consistent with the gospel that those called by God,



chosen and faithful to Christ our Lord, are exempt from his wrath?

- C. Does scripture describe any time in Israel's history where God has set aside a faithful remnant for protection and to fulfill his purpose?
- D. Does the sealing of the 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel and the resurrection/transformation of the saints, as described in Revelation 7, occur before God's wrath begins?
- E. Is there any hint in scripture that some in Israel would receive special protection during Satan's wrath?

Since all of these can be answered in the affirmative, it serves to illustrate the consistency of scripture and the congruence of the will of God. The only way in which these events can be understood differently is to view them from an unfounded perspective.

The subject of the first eight verses is clearly given – a remnant of Israel. A question one needs to ask is – do the Jews of the author's day represent the entirety of Israel? Those referred to as Jews in John's day consisted of at least two of the remaining twelve tribes; Judah and Benjamin. We know this because the apostle Paul was from the tribe of Benjamin. So what of the remaining ten tribes? They were taken into captivity by the Assyrians centuries before John's time. They and their descendants have been dispersed throughout the world as subsequent empires arose; the Medo-Persian empire conquered the Babylonians who came to power in the region, then the Greeks conquered the Medo-Persians, then the Romans conquered the Greeks. John was writing during the early period of the Roman empire. The descendants of Israel still existed even though they did not constitute a specific group or nation. They were, by that time, intermixed with the successive nations who conquered the region.

John, based on what he sees and is told, goes so far as to name each of the twelve tribes; the descendants of Jacob. Though we don't understand how and John doesn't explain, God is clearly able

to distinguish the descendants of Israel. If he's named every star, I'm certain he can handle this. We simply have to trust what John was told. As was shown in chapter 7, these 144,000 represent a faithful remnant from the descendants of Jacob (Israel), whom God has called for his purpose. He will perform and complete his will, and they have a part in that.

During the time of Great Tribulation, when the satanic beast pursues them, they are gathered in a place where they are protected from him. It seems consistent then that some level of protection would be afforded them once Christ comes on the scene and prepares to execute God's wrath upon the world. According to Revelation 7 this protection comes in the form of a sealing mark upon their foreheads. Is it reasonable to consider that God might want to show his power in contrast to the deception wrought by the beast power and his mark? Revelation 14 appears to indicate this, since after being marked and sealed by God and surviving the first six trumpets, they are finally redeemed and counted among the firstfruits.

Revelation 14:1-5, 9-11

*Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. . . . It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.*

*And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and*

*they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.*

Shifting our focus to the remaining verses of Revelation 7, where it describes the great multitude, we are introduced to a great multitude of many nations and languages, and they stand before the throne of God in the presence of the Lamb – clothed in white robes and with palms in their hands. As we saw in chapter eight, we need to look at the attributes assigned to them by the author:

- Innumerable multitude (no man can number) – again God is able to number the faithful whom he's called over the ages and extended faith and his Holy Spirit to
- Of every nation, people, kindred, and tongue – the many gospel references to Israel and the Gentiles covers this group (Revelation 5:9-10)
- Clothed in white robes – those to whom the righteousness of the Lord is attributed
- Palms in their hands – praising God for the great work he has completed in them

One of McGee's assertions is that this multitude is one of three groups of people described in 1 Corinthians 10:32 – the Gentiles. Yet by looking further we can see that scripture gives a different assessment of those clothed in white robes. Let's see what Revelation says about this group arrayed in white and whether it is consistently talking about a group of believers in Christ Jesus. The first mention of a group clothed in white is in Revelation 4:4. This however is speaking of the 24 elders, not an innumerable group.

However, in Revelation 6 at the opening of the fifth seal, a group is given white robes.

Revelation 6:9-11

*When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, "O*

*Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.*

So this group represents those who have died in Christ and were martyred for their trust in God and faith in his son. The time of the fifth seal represents the martyrdom which will occur before and during the Great Tribulation – the time of Satan's wrath prior to Christ's appearance and God's judgment upon the world. The picture being painted in chapter seven of Revelation is that of the whole group of believers worshipping God and Jesus Christ, arrayed in white and standing before the throne, including those mentioned in the fifth seal. (Revelation 7:10-12)

So at some point these two groups came together. Look further in chapter seven.

Revelation 7:14

*I said to him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

So at what event could these have been transformed and given white robes, stand before the throne of God and Jesus Christ, and worship crying with a loud voice – salvation to our God?

Well, the very event that brought the Great Tribulation to a close and brought them their salvation – the return of our Lord. In fact the end of Revelation 6 opens up the question that is answered in Revelation 7.

*Revelation 6:17 – for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand? (ESV)*

We can see further clarification of this in Revelation 19, which parallels chapter 7:9-12 nicely.

Revelation 19:1-8

*After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; . . . And from the throne came a voice saying,*

*Praise our God,  
all you his servants,  
you who fear him,  
small and great.*

*Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,*

*Hallelujah!*

*For the Lord our God  
the Almighty reigns.*

*Let us rejoice and exult*

*and give him the glory,  
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,  
and his Bride has made herself ready;*

*it was granted her to clothe herself  
with fine linen, bright and pure –*

*for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*

Further in Revelation 19 we see the return of our Lord at Zion, and the armies that accompany him to execute God's wrath and judgment are likewise arrayed in fine linen, pure and white. It becomes very evident then that Revelation 7 is an interlude between the sign of the Son of Man appearing in the clouds and the ushering in of God's wrath and judgment described in Revelation chapter 8.

In this interlude we see the sealing of the 144,000 from the tribes

of Israel to protect them through that wrath along with the transformation and resurrection of believers (already sealed by the Holy Spirit) at Christ's return. And how is it we've arrived at this place? By the grace of God and the work of Jesus Christ to complete the firstfruits of his new creation.

## Summary and Conclusion

The review of the scriptures in the Book of Revelation to John was helpful in showing there is no clear support for the pre-tribulation rapture of the saints within it. According to scripture, including references in Revelation 7 and 14, there is clear support for the rapture of the saints as described in Matthew 24:30-31; Mark 13:26-27; Luke 21:27-28; and 2 Thessalonians 2 as shown earlier in sections two and three. This rapture occurs at the end of the Great Tribulation period when Christ appears in the sky for all to see.

Because the faithful are reconciled to God, they are exempt from his wrath. However, before Christ's appearance in the sky, their faithfulness will be tested, as reflected in the seven congregations, with the expectation that they will remain the children of light and hold fast to the Lord and his words of truth and life (1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 1 Peter 1:6-9). This conquering of the world by the faithful, in the spiritual sense, is a consistent message of the gospel and brings with it great rewards.

If we set aside most presuppositions and the various interpretations which cloud our view and prefer instead a supernatural view, the evidence in scripture and the viewpoint of the authors appears to identify the 24 elders as created spirit beings. Together with the four living creatures, they serve in roles of authority in holiness and righteousness within God's divine council. This is reflected by their involvement around the throne of God even before Christ's return, by their apparel, and by the crowns upon their heads. There is much

more that can be said about God's divine council, and I suggest further reading on the subject<sup>3</sup>.

When seen in an unfiltered context, the seventh chapter of the Book of Revelation provides an important interlude between the appearance of our Lord in the sky and the correction he will dispense upon the world to break their pride. During this time he will fulfill his promise to his faithful; sealing the 144,000 faithful descendants of Israel as an example to the unbelievers (both Jew and Gentile), and by redeeming his firstfruits of salvation (his elect) from the earth. Both events are visible and spectacular, leading to praise of God and the work he's doing in Christ Jesus. Though a milestone for sure, it only begins the process of governing the world in righteousness and leading the world into obedience to God, as he prepares the earthly kingdom for the age to come.

There are several presuppositions from which our viewpoint on the Book of Revelation is derived:

- Jesus Christ alone has the authority and power to administer God's righteous judgment within the church and throughout the world. (Revelation 1; 5)
- God has a divine council with which he collaborates and delegates the working out of his will in heaven and on earth.
- Aside from the redemptive work God is doing for humanity, there lies underneath a more fundamental purpose to reveal his righteous judgment.
- A divine and supernatural perspective leads one to view the seven angels in Christ's right hand just as they're described. Nowhere in scripture are humans referred to as angels.

## Notes

1. The Rapture Question - second edition, John F. Walvoord - Chapter 19/  
The Rapture in the Book of Revelation

2. The Rapture Come Next (1997, Revised 2006), J. Vernon McGee, pages 10-11
3. The Unseen Realm - Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible, Michael S. Heiser





## CLAIM V

# The Body and Bride of Christ is in This Dispensation Only

Another assertion of Walvoord is that the body and bride of Christ is in this dispensation only and is separate from the saints of previous dispensations and those that appear during the tribulation. A concluding paragraph in his discussion of The Meaning of the Church outlines some elements of this doctrine.

“The ultimate proof of the teaching that the present age is a parentheses is in the positive revelation concerning the church as the body of Christ and the related truths that reveal the church to be an organism, a body of believers subject to translation and being caught away to heaven. The church is regarded as a bride being prepared for the bridegroom. These distinctive truths establish the concept that the church is to be in this dispensation only. As such, the church is distinguished clearly from the saints who appear on earth during the time of the Tribulation.”<sup>1</sup>

This statement regarding the uniqueness of the church touches on some presuppositions from which the conclusion is derived. It's necessary that we address these.

1. The present age is a parenthesis in the divine program for Israel
2. The church is distinguished from the saints of the tribulation period
3. The church alone is subject to translation and being caught up to heaven

Let's begin with the last two. Since we've already covered these at

length in sections two and three, we should be able to recognize how Walvoord comes to this conclusion:

- Through the lens of pretribulationism and dispensationalism he sees the Great Tribulation and God's wrath as one.
- He recognizes the differences in the work God is doing in Israel with that of the modern church.
- He fails to distinguish disobedient Israel, those broken off branches, from the faithful who remain.

By distinguishing the time of Satan's wrath (the Great Tribulation) from the time of God's wrath, the division of saints is no longer required. Any saints that arise during the tribulation are included, whether alive or dead, with the entire body of believers who are "caught up" to Christ at his appearance in the skies above.

God has clearly outlined, prophesied, and will fulfill the work he has started in Israel – to redeem Israel in its entirety and to show them as a model nation to the world during his earthly reign. Though the general path and timing of that redemptive work varies for Israel when compared with the modern church, the end result will be the same – the salvation of their souls. For Israel as a whole this entrance into the new covenant promise isn't manifested to them until after Christ has returned to the earth and established himself as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. What pretribulationism and dispensationalism overlook is that not all Israel is rejected. Not all of Israel was cut off in order to graft in the Gentiles (Romans 11:17). Some remained who were faithful (Romans 11:2b-7).

Those elect in Israel, chosen by God, obtained the promises to the same degree that believers in the current age have obtained them. This is fitting, since they are one in Christ. They are included, therefore, in the fulfillment of those promises at Christ's appearance. Even though they could not see or hope for such a glorious outcome, since it was necessary that it be hidden from them, they will be partakers of it nonetheless.

Regarding Walvoord's first presupposition, it is only for the disobedient in Israel that such a parenthesis exists. It is the faithful in Israel who link with the modern body of believers to form a group – called, chosen, and faithful to our Lord – whom together at their glorification will in turn glorify God for the faith entrusted to them. We will delve into this much deeper in the next chapter.

This however does not address the complete depth of Walvoord's claim. He goes on to consider these additional points:

- Equality with Israel in the body of Christ<sup>2</sup>
  - Heirs together, members together, and sharers together in the promise of Christ
- Present age church (ecclesia) is a different body of believers from those of prior dispensations<sup>3</sup>
  - Israel could not anticipate the “Christ in you” afforded the church
  - Israel is regarded as a nation and a people among whom God dwelt. “Christ in you” is utterly foreign to Israel's past or future
- The church is, by virtue of the mystery manifested in it, unique, and no other dispensation enjoys the nature of that mystery<sup>4</sup>

There are some similarities in these points to those already addressed. However they touch on topics fundamental to the work God and his Christ are doing and therefore warrant a more thorough discussion. Again these will be framed in the form of questions as follows:

1. What is the full scope and meaning of *ecclesia*?
2. Is there a common Spirit among those faithful to the Lord?
3. What is the mystery of God, and what part does his body of believers have in it?

## Notes

1. The Rapture Question - second edition, John F. Walvoord - The Church Age as Parenthesis (pg 28)
2. The Rapture Question - second edition, John F. Walvoord - The Mystery of the One Body (pg 29)
3. The Rapture Question - second edition, John F. Walvoord - The Church as an Organism (pg 33)
4. The Rapture Question - second edition, John F. Walvoord - Conclusion (pg 37)

# Chapter 12 - What is the Mystery of God Revealed in Jesus Christ?

We'll begin by looking at the more fundamental of the three questions we left off with in the previous chapter; what is the Mystery of God revealed in Jesus Christ, and what part does his body of believers have in it? By letting scripture define the full scope of that mystery, we'll be able to measure each assertion against it. Let's begin in Colossians 1.

Colossians 1:25-28

*of which I (Paul) became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.*

Here are my observations:

- Paul, a revealer of the current dispensation of God, that is, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ
- A revealer of the mystery, now made known by the will of God
- That mystery – salvation to the Gentiles
- In the form, or manifestation of – Christ in you, the hope of your glory
- We see this glory at his appearing (Colossians 3:4)

## A Mystery That Is Hidden

If it was hidden from ages and generations then clearly it existed in some form. Only now is that form being made evident and obvious to those whom God chooses to reveal it to. This mystery, salvation to the Gentiles (Christ in you), merely clarifies the unity within the Godhead to which we are called to be partakers. This unity, spoken of by Christ himself, is meant to include all who come to believe in him. Let's look at the Fourth Gospel 14 and 17 to see if this is the case.

Fourth Gospel 14:18-20 (21-29)

*I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.*

Fourth Gospel 17:20-23

*I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.*

There is no distinction in the place or the time implied here. It is, in fact, open-ended in that Christ speaks also of “those who believe in me through their word”. The obvious focus of that belief is in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (vs 8).

If we look further in the Fourth Gospel 17 to verse 24, we can see evidence of Christ's desire that we share in the glory given to him by the Father: *Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.*

We also see that this, unity with God through Jesus Christ, is another part, or characteristic of the mystery. The concept of unity with God would have been completely foreign and considered heretical by the Jewish leaders of Christ's day. And this is exactly how they responded to Christ's claim of being one with the Father.

Another important characteristic of the mystery brought out by the author is the purpose behind the unity – it was repeated several times:

- so that the world may believe that you did send me
- so that the world may know that you did send me
- and that you did love them just as you loved me

We can see this purpose further detailed in 1 Peter 2.

1 Peter 2: 9-10

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

Those called in this dispensation – the recipients and partakers of the mystery – fulfill a purpose in that as Christ glorifies us, we also glorify and confirm him to the world. So when might “*the world may believe that you did send me*”? And when might “*those whom you have given me may also be with me where I am*”?

It is clarified for us in 2 Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians 1:7,10-12

*and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels . . . when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. To this end we*



*always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Let's identify some of the key details given here. The author outlines the answer to Christ's prayer earlier in the Fourth Gospel chapter 17.

- When our Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven
- He comes to be glorified by his saints
- So that our testimony about you (and your belief in him) may be believed in that day
- He comes to glorify his saints with him

Let's look further into the mystery to discover what other attributes or characteristics it contains, as detailed in Ephesians chapter 1. I'll note the highlights:

#### Ephesians 1

- To the saints and the brethren
- We (Gentiles) are adopted through Christ
- We respond with praise to the glory of God's grace poured out on us through Christ
- In whom we have salvation and forgiveness of sin
- By his grace, wisdom, and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will and purpose
- By a plan for the fullness of time – to make all things new through Christ
- By whom we have been chosen, marked, and sealed with the Holy Spirit (vs 13)
- That we should be among the first to trust in Christ, in whom is the word of truth – the gospel of our salvation
- Who is the guarantee of our inheritance, for the glory of his honor

The church of believers at Ephesus are called saints and the faithful in Christ;

- Saints because they are his and serve him
- Faithful because they believe and trust in him

We are adopted as children of God, through Jesus Christ – the natural son. Recall that as a nation, Israel was chosen, marked and sealed. Though marked in form, they are partakers of the substance which is Christ. We're the adopted ones. We also see that the church is not the mystery, but instead, is whom the mystery is revealed to and manifest in; that Gentiles now have been offered salvation and forgiveness of sins according to the good pleasure of his will. (Colossians 1:27, Revelation 10:7, Romans 11:25; 16:25, Ephesians 6:19; 1 Corinthians 2:6-8)

Most importantly he declares an essential part of the mystery – that all things in heaven and earth are made new through Christ Jesus. And lastly, we are merely the first of the Gentiles (read again verse 12) to believe and trust in Christ. It is under this new covenant that we Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit, through which we are sealed and marked as God's people, and by whom the law of love is written on our hearts and in our minds. Those who are the first are not the only.

This concept of being first is not new to the gospel message.

Romans 8:19,21,23,29

*For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. . . . that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. . .*

*And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. . .*

*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be*

*conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

As we can see in verse 29, Christ is the first-born (resurrected to glory) among many brethren; the first of the firstfruits. This is also a fulfillment of the offerings made by Israel; one in particular – the wave sheaf offering. It was an offering of the first of the firstfruits of the harvest.

Prior, in Romans 8, we saw that the Gentile saints, who have the firstfruits of the spirit, wait for the adoption, or the fulfillment of that adoption, by the salvation of our bodies into the glorious likeness of Jesus Christ. So the uniqueness of the saints is not unique in the way that Walvoord supposes. The church, the body of believers in Christ, are unique in that they are the firstfruits of the Gentiles, the adopted children of God; the firstfruits, not the only fruit of the harvest. Even Walvoord concedes the equality with Israel that believers in this dispensation enjoy. This he shows from Ephesians 3. Look again at his assertion:

- Equality with Israel in the body of Christ
  - Heirs together
  - Members together
  - Sharers together in the promise in Christ

For whatever reason though, he misses the full intent of that equality – in that like the firstfruits of the Gentiles, the faithful in Israel will be harvested into the body of Christ. Recall that those faithful in Israel continue on the tree to which the faithful Gentiles are grafted into.

It's also clear that Walvoord misses the full intent of that equality, or perhaps better stated unity, because his other assertions conflict with this one. Before jumping into Ephesians 3, let's first review the topic in chapter two. Our salvation comes by the grace of God through the faith extended to us. We didn't do this – it is a gift from God.

## Ephesians 2:8-19

- We are God's creation, created through Jesus Christ for good works
- Prior, we were Gentiles in the flesh
  - Called uncircumcision
  - Different from those called circumcision, namely the children of Israel
  - Aliens to the customs and covenant of the promise
  - Without God (not a people)
  - Afar off (from God)

The Gentiles were without God while Israel was with God. Gentiles were far from God while Israel dwelt near to him. Israel is already part of the household of God.

- But through Jesus Christ, you can be made a fellow citizen with the saints. This only makes sense if those saints are already citizens.
  - All brought nearer by his blood
  - He is our peace
  - He makes both uncircumcision and circumcision one (chosen of Israel one with chosen of Gentiles)
  - He breaks down the wall that separates them
  - He abolishes the enmity between them
  - He reconciled both in one body with God
  - Preaching peace to those afar off and to those already near
  - Enabling both to draw nearer, by one Spirit, to the Father
  - No longer foreigners or strangers
  - Fellow citizens and children of the household of God

It seems very clear that the unity of the body of Christ was never intended for those of the current dispensation only. It was a continuation and magnification of a relationship with God which Israel already received. Though many neglected that relationship and followed idols, the faithful in Israel remained. Israel was not the recipient of the promises for their own sake:

- It was for the sake of God's name and purpose
- By virtue of Abraham's faith and God's promise for the benefit of all nations (Gentiles)
- It merely started with Israel

## Roots of the Mystery

Let's see if this holds true. Let's look further in Ephesians 3, but we will not stop at a few verses – so that we only get a glimpse. Instead let's get the full picture. I suggest a thorough reading of the whole chapter first. Here I will focus on some highlights.

### Ephesians 3

- Paul, for the sake of the Gentiles, brings the mystery of this time of God's grace
  - Paul is an Israelite
  - Of the tribe of Benjamin (not Judah)
  - A Pharisee
  - Righteous under the law, blameless
- Who better to reveal the mystery of Christ and the mystery in Christ
- So that the Gentiles (uncircumcision) should be:
  - fellow heirs
  - partners of his body
  - heirs and partakers of the promise given through him by the gospel
- The gospel – the unsearchable riches of God's grace in Christ
- Christ and his gospel are the mystery (1 Corinthians 2:6-8)
- It was hidden from the world for ages
- The body of believers in Jesus Christ are the manifestation of this mystery – revealed now to angels and powers in heaven
- God's wisdom is fulfilled in Jesus Christ
- In and by whom we have access to the Father, since in Christ's death and resurrection we are brought near to God – into the

very “holy of holies”. Recall that at Christ’s death the curtain separating the “holy of holies” from the common temple area was torn in two. Christ’s death and resurrection not only draws us near, but also opens access to those who are already near him – those faithful in Israel.

- This is the height and depth and length and breadth – that all things are made new in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:10)
- Unto him be glory in his church, by Jesus Christ throughout all ages, world without end, amen.

So is it only Ephesians 3 that presents this idea that the mystery in Christ, although revealed in this time now, is intended for all, in all ages?

Even though Israel could not anticipate the mystery in Christ (and salvation for the Gentiles), that doesn’t mean they would be denied it. Were there not those in Israel who in faithful expectation looked for the appearance of the Messiah? These are the citizens of the household of God to whom the Gentile believers would be added.

Recall that believers in Christ – now called “the people of God” – were not the first to be thus. This name was, in times past, used to refer to all the children of Israel, but because some in Israel provoked God with their worship of idols, he chose to extend this new covenant to Gentiles also. Moses foretells this in Deuteronomy 32.

Deuteronomy 32:16,19-21

*They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations they provoked him to anger. . . . The Lord saw it and spurned them, because of the provocation of his sons and his daughters. And he said, I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness. They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are*

*no people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.*  
(Romans 10:19-21)

The subtle way in which the Lord works always surprises this reader; subtlety not being a strength of my own. There are numerous commentaries that capture this subtle reckoning with Israel's idolatry; Benson Commentary and Pulpit Commentary are examples. I chose to cite Barnes' Notes on the Bible in this case:

God would mete out to them the same measure as they had done to him. Though chosen by the one God to be his own, they had preferred idols, which were no gods. So therefore would he prefer to his people that which was no people. As they angered him with their vanities, so would he provoke them by adopting in their stead those whom they counted as nothing. The terms "not a people" and "a foolish nation" mean such a people as not being God's, would not be accounted a people at all, and such a nation is destitute of that which alone can make a really "wise and understanding people", namely the knowledge of the revealed word and will of God.

So then, because Israel was rejected are we to conclude that they will not share in that which we've been called to be "fellow heirs" with them in – namely the promises in Christ Jesus – our hope of glory?

## Based on Unity

Let's continue in Romans 9 to see more about the condition of Israel and its stumbling for our sake.

Romans 9:25 – 10:4

*As indeed he says in Hosea, (Hosea 1:9-10)*

*"Those who were not my people I will call my people,  
and her who was not beloved I will call beloved."*

*“And in the very place where it was said to them, You are not my people,  
there they will be called sons of the living God.”*

*And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.”*

*And as Isaiah predicted,  
“If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring,  
we would have been like Sodom  
and become like Gomorrah.”*

*What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written,*

*“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”*

*Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

So Israel has not attained the righteousness of God afforded those who by faith believe and have attained. So was the stumbling for their sake or for ours? And what will be the end of it for Israel? The answers are revealed in Romans 11. It may be helpful to review



commentaries on the chapter after you've read it fully. I will focus on the highlights:

## Romans 11

- God has not rejected Israel
- A remnant of Israel continues, elected by grace, not by works
- Israel (as a nation) has not obtained what it sought
- But the elected ones (of Israel) have obtained it
- Both are according to the will and purpose of God
- Has Israel fallen completely? No, only enough so that salvation has come to the Gentiles (vs 11)
  - and this to make them (Israel) more zealous
  - their stumbling brought riches to the world
  - their condemnation brought riches to the Gentiles
- How much more will their restoration bring?
  - it will bring them resurrection (vs 15)
- If the firstfruit is holy (Christ), the rest of the lump (those abiding in him) is holy also
- If the root is holy (Christ), so are the branches
  - some branches (Israel) were cut off, yet some remained (vs 17)
  - wild branches (Gentiles) were grafted in their place and are now part of the root (Christ), who sustains us all
  - some in Israel were cut off because of unbelief
  - those who remain and those grafted in exist by faith – it is the gift of God
- If they (Israel) do not continue in unbelief
  - they will be grafted in (vs 23)
  - God is able to graft them in again
- They will be more fruitful being grafted into their natural olive tree
- Another aspect of the mystery:
  - blindness to a degree has befallen many in Israel
  - but only until the time of the Gentiles is completed (vs 25)
- And then all Israel shall be saved

- a deliverer (Christ) shall come out of Zion
- He shall remove ungodliness from Jacob
- they shall have the same covenant from God – when he has forgiven their sins
- The blindness of Israel was for the benefit of the world
- God does not withdraw his gift and his call (vs 29)
- We (Gentiles) were disobedient
  - and obtained mercy by their disobedience
- They (Israel) are disobedient to the mercy upon us
  - that there may be mercy upon them also
- For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

As surprising as you may find this, it's quite clear that the current dispensation is not unique in receiving the mysteries of God and the associated promises. Israel too will be recipients. In fact Paul indicated that some who remained faithful, a remnant, already have received, through grace, the election we enjoy. Paul implies this in Romans 9:24-28 and clarifies it in Romans 11.

Romans 11:2b-7

*Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened,*

The implications for this are significant. If it proves to be what it implies, then we can be certain that it changes the way we view this dispensation, the saints that compose it, and those who precede it.

- The current dispensation expands, not divides, the distribution

of God's grace to include the Gentiles. This is an inclusive perspective instead of the exclusionary one presented by Walvoord and the dispensational framework.

- Faith, trust, and belief in God (which are a gift from God) transcends the covenants and dispensations. Consider the following:
  - Christ is the God of the old covenant
  - If faith in God saves, then those preceding this dispensation, through belief, received salvation, righteousness, and all the benefits of being in the body of believers
  - This began with a Gentile, Abraham, and will ironically end with the Gentiles. In other words, God intends to be the God of humanity, not just the God of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
  - The faithful descendants of Abraham are considered firstfruits to salvation

According to Walvoord and the dispensational model, the pre-tribulation rapture must stand on the division of the saints<sup>1</sup>. This is the very thing Christ seeks to unite. At first there does appear to be a division, not of faith, but of role and purpose. This Paul clearly identifies in Romans – in that the stumbling of the Jews and the disbelief in Israel was, according to God's will, an invitation and inclusion of the rest of the world (the Gentiles) to his grace and the resulting promises.

Though not all Gentiles will believe at this time, those that do are grafted into the body of believers – of which those elected in Israel, who do believe, are already a part. So that leaves two large groups of unbelievers:

- Those of Israel – as an opportunity for the Gentiles
- Those of the Gentiles – a source of motivation for Israel

The group of believers, however, are not divided. They are united in one body, Christ, for a common purpose; to glorify God and Jesus

Christ at his appearing. Is there any doubt that believers under either covenant can bring praise, glory, and honor to God and Jesus Christ (the Messiah of Israel) by confirming their faith and trust in God and the fruits of that faith in their lives? But some might say that the spirit wasn't given under the old covenant – only in the new. Firstly, do we think that the faith of the great men and women, and the prophets of God was obtained of themselves, apart from the Spirit of God? Certainly not. Like us they were elected and chosen, and faith was the gift of God by grace. Have we forgotten who the God of the old covenant was? Jesus Christ!

For those who called him Lord were right in that he is Lord over all and in all. And though the mystery was hidden from them and from the world, it was God's will that they, being elected and chosen, would be partakers in the mystery – though unknowingly.

## Rooted in Faith

So if faith was delivered to saints of old, then what was the means by which it was delivered? For that we must return to Romans. Here again I suggest a complete and thorough reading of the entire book to get the full grasp of what Paul is proclaiming. I will draw out highlights that clarify his point.

Romans 1:16-17

- The gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes. To the Jew first.
- The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith

It seems fitting that the Jews should get preference here, at least in a general sense, since theirs was the promise long before it was offered to the Gentiles. Being one of the tribes of Israel, they are part of the natural branches. Now as in the past, the righteousness of God was manifested in faith by those who believed and lived. But faith lived is faith received from God – it is the gift of God.

And though the law constrained many in Israel from attaining the righteousness through belief in God, some did. Recall that Romans 11:17 is consistent when it declares that some of the branches (of Israel) were broken off. Not all.

Romans 3:28-30

- By faith a man is justified, not by the law
- It is one God who justifies both Jews and Gentiles by faith. The Jews don't have one God and the Gentiles another.

Romans 4:13

- The promise to Abraham and his posterity was made through the righteousness of faith, not the law
- Acceptance with God depends on faith, not on works

Romans 4:16, 23-25

- By faith we are justified by grace – it is a gift
- Both Abraham and us are justified by the same faith
- And therefore look to the same salvation – the common salvation

Romans 5:8-11,17

- Did not Christ, through his blood, reconcile all – past, present, and future; in this dispensation, any previous and any future?
- Though all are reconciled, it doesn't require that all have the same role

Romans 6:8-10

- Does not his resurrection overcome death for all? Especially to those who believe?

Romans 9:23-28

- God poured out his mercy on those he called in Israel first (Romans 11:5-7)
- But also the Jews and Gentiles

- To the Gentile – I will call them a people
- To Israel – a remnant shall be saved (Isaiah 10:22)

Romans 9:30-33

- Many in Israel who did not attain to righteousness did so due to lack of faith
- But what of those whom God gave faith to believe?
- And those to whom he accounted righteousness?

Surely that faith, which comes by grace is the same faith we have in common in the one body, that is, Christ, leading us to the common salvation we look for at his appearing.

Romans 10-12-13

- There is one Lord, over all – to those who call on the Lord

## Expanding the Promise to the Faithful

So wherein then has God extended this grace to some in Israel?

Romans 11:5-7

- A remnant in Israel remains, by grace, through faith
- The elected ones in Israel attained what Israel as a nation sought but did not attain

Were there not those in Israel who rejoiced to see and know the promise of God fulfilled in his Redeemer? Were not the twelve and the many in Israel who believed in the Lord abiding in a faith already established before his appearing? Is not the tree, of which the branch the faithful in Israel is based, connected to the same root of the tree to which we Gentiles are grafted in – that is Christ?

Romans 11:16-17

- The branch of Israel is based on the same root – Christ, and we are all one

- Made holy by the firstfruit
- Though some were cut off, did not some remain?

Romans 11:24-27

- They who have been granted righteousness in Israel are of the natural olive tree
  - We (the Gentiles) are the adopted ones, of the wild branches grafted in
  - By what arrogance do we assume righteousness over Israel and those whom God chose and elected in Israel by his grace?
  - All who dwell in righteousness are already grafted in through belief
  - When Israel as a whole comes to belief, they too shall be saved
  - And by the same covenant

Romans 11:28-30

- Those in unbelief in Israel are, according to the gospel:
  - Enemies (disobedient) for our sake, that the believing Gentiles might be grafted in
  - Yet still elected and chosen as the people of God and beloved
  - God has not withdrawn his call
  - There will again be mercy upon them, just as there is now upon us

Paul provides a concluding wrapper, the larger context, for the work that God is doing in Christ.

Romans 11:32 – *For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. (KJV)*

Was not this common salvation sought by those whom God elected in Israel by grace?

## 1 Peter 1:9-12

- The reward of faith is the salvation of our souls
- The prophets searched and prophesied concerning the grace delivered to us
- By the Spirit of Christ which dwelt in them

So if they, by the grace of God, received faith and righteousness and were accepted into the one body, Jesus Christ, how much more should they, being the natural branches of the tree, obtain salvation revealed in Jesus Christ at his appearing? It is this faithful remnant that will inherit the fullness of the promises and will serve in Christ's kingdom in a role separate from those of the rest of the nation. These firstfruits will be inheritors while the rest of the nation are called into a new covenant that will ultimately lead them into the fullness of that inheritance.

It's worth noting at this point the broader scope of the mystery of God revealed in Jesus Christ. It isn't limited to "Christ in us" – as significant as that is. Stepping back we can see the other characteristics of the mystery of God:

- Unity with the Father and with Christ for all (Fourth Gospel 14, 17)
- Salvation to the Gentiles, their hope of glory (Colossians 1)
- Heirs together in the body with Israel – one body, one new man from the two (Ephesians 2, 3)
- Called to glorify Christ at his appearing and to glorify God at the day of trial (1 Peter 2, 2 Thessalonians 1, Fourth Gospel 17)
- To make all things new in Christ (Ephesians 1)
- The grace of God and the covenant of salvation for Gentiles and for Israel (Romans 11)
- Israel will eventually attain the promises sought, though some, through belief, have already obtained (Romans 11)

Is it any surprise then that Paul concludes the matter in Romans 11 astounded – *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge*



*of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

## A Broader Scope to the Church

There remains one question left to address regarding the full scope of the meaning of *ecclesia* – the church. Of Walvoord's four meanings cited for *ecclesia*, the fourth, used of the body of Christ, is the most challenging when looking to see how it's applied to Israel. He bases this meaning on 1 Corinthians 12:13. Let's take a moment and review the context beyond the single verse where Paul describes how the Holy Spirit is dispensed.

### 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

- It is the same God who empowers them all
- The Spirit of wisdom
- The Spirit of knowledge
- The Spirit of faith
- The Spirit of healing
- The Spirit to work miracles
- The Spirit of Prophecy
- The Spirit of discernment
- The Spirit of language; speaking and interpreting
- Each distributed individually as he wills

### 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

- One body, many members – so it is with Christ
- It is through the Spirit that we enter into the body of Christ

Is not the dispensation of the Spirit evidenced by Paul to instruct the Corinthians similar to that described by Isaiah?

### Isaiah 11:1-2

- The Spirit of the Lord
- The Spirit of wisdom

- The Spirit of understanding
- The Spirit of counsel
- The Spirit of might
- The Spirit of knowledge
- The Spirit of the fear of the Lord

Of the four meanings of *ecclesia*, none of them appear to address the most direct or literal meaning of the word; people called out from the world and to God. Certainly this is as true for the faithful in Israel as it is for those of the Gentiles. Also, this definition and underlying meaning is consistent with the teaching in scripture that God calls according to his purpose. This was covered in some detail previously in chapter three. There it was highlighted how the process of being called, chosen and faithful corresponds with the work God is doing for us and in us.

As heirs together of the kingdom with Israel, this one body in Christ is established and based on faith. As I've indicated previously, the mystery of God required that Israel did not fully grasp the fullness of the promises in the Lord. Through the common faith, established in the covenant with their father Abraham, those promises were appointed to them, though unknowingly, and established in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world.

#### 1 Peter 1:3-24

- Born again by God's mercy and purpose
- Who by God's power are guarded through faith to receive salvation
- God's grace was prophesied to be revealed in Christ
- The prophets of old sought to understand this grace by the Spirit of Christ in them
- They understood they were not serving themselves but serving you – those alive to see and hear the manifestation of that grace
- Your ransom was paid by the blood of Christ – a lamb without spot or blemish

- Though foreknown before the foundation of the world, Christ is manifested now for the sake of all believers in God
- Our purification comes in part by obedience to the truth – the living and abiding word of God

Although it might appear to us that the gospel presented by Peter in Asia-minor was referring to Gentile Christians, the context implies otherwise (vs 10-12). The *grace that was to be yours* is just as applicable to Israel then as it is to the Gentiles now. Consider the examples we've already touched on in Jeremiah and the minor prophets. Certainly there are prophecies on both accounts for the grace of God to be extended to either party. Yet for Israel, clearly dispersed since their captivity, there would exist an anticipation of the revelation of that grace – now in Christ. (James 1:1)

Even if we set aside the technicalities of who the audience is in chapter one, there remains the fundamental basis for the salvation of their souls – their faith in the Lord (vs 5, 9, 20-21). However, Peter continues in chapter two to distinguish between those who are obedient to the truth revealed in Christ and those who are not.

#### 1 Peter 2:4-12

- As the cornerstone of God's temple, Christ is precious – though rejected by men (Isaiah 26:4; 28:16; 30:29)
- You too are being built into that spiritual temple
- That honor is for those who believe
- For those who don't believe, Christ is the rock of offense. As Paul noted, this condition was prophesied for Israel (Romans 11).
- A chosen race. Hebrews are a race, Gentiles are not.
- A royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own people – these references would not be lost on Israelite descendants
- Though Christians are figuratively considered sojourners and exiles, Israelite descendants would be so both literally and figuratively
- Peter concludes the thought by contrasting their conduct with

that of Gentiles. This is another indication to the broader scope of his audience (James 1:1)

The common faith and the working of the Spirit of God clearly demonstrates the underlying unity of the body of believers. If the church seeks to identify itself as exclusive and separate from those faithful to the Lord, it does so contrary to the fundamental purpose and will of God.

## Summary and Conclusion

When one examines the pre-tribulation doctrine as we have – and sees its fundamental points in complete contradiction to scripture, the role of the body of Christ, and the will of God – the nature of this final claim becomes crystal clear. Those who developed this teaching did not do so because they noticed an obvious distinction between OT saints and those spoken of during the time of the Gentiles, which then led them to the awareness of the pre-tribulation rapture. Quite the opposite. The need for a distinction in the saints was derived from an afterthought which, by placing the rapture before the tribulation event begins, leaves modern saints and those described in Revelation 7 and Revelation 19 behind. It became necessary then to derive a distinction and division of these saints in order to resolve the obvious conflict in favor of a less-obvious conflict. But as we've seen, both conflicts are made obvious in scripture, because they stand in direct opposition to the unity in the body of Christ.

In revisiting the assertions, it becomes clear that they are not made according to a full acceptance of the mystery of God in Jesus Christ. In the mystery we see that:

- There is more than equality for the Gentiles with Israel: there is unity in Christ – one body
- The present age is not a different body of believers, just the firstfruits of the Spirit to the Gentiles

- These are being added to the faithful firstfruits in Israel
- The mystery in Christ is intended for all and all will have, in their appointed time, an opportunity to believe and reside in that one body (Jeremiah 31-33)
- Though Israel in the past and present could not anticipate the mystery, though God gave them a glimpse of it (Genesis 49:8-10), he kept it from them for our sake and for the fulfillment of his will (1 Corinthians 2:6-8).
- The only uniqueness the present church can claim, if it is a claim at all, is that they are the Gentile firstfruits of the Spirit in whom the mystery was manifested and made known.
- It is evident that the will of God is to make that mystery known to the rest of Israel and the world at Christ's appearing when he is glorified by his saints, his chosen ones, his faithful elect since Abraham – the body of Christ.

The presuppositions relevant in this discussion are as follows:

- The work of Jesus Christ and the will of God unites the faithful of the first covenant with the faithful of the new covenant. (Ephesians 2; 3; Romans 5; 8-11)
- Faith, which is a gift of God, is the basis of the hope of salvation (Romans 11; 1 Peter 1; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Jude 3)
- Yeshua, the Christ, is the mystery of God for all humanity with all that that entails. He alone fulfills and completes God's work. (Revelation 5)

## Notes

1. The Rapture Question - second edition, John F. Walvoord - Doctrine of the Church in Relation to the Rapture Question and Chapter 2 - The Meaning of the Church (pg 20, 21-37)

# Chapter 13 - Review and Conclusion

The pre-tribulation rapture teaching, popular among premillennial denominations, is built upon numerous ideas or presuppositions. By addressing these underlying ideas which support the teaching, one can make a more effective assessment. Challenging ideas at the level of scriptural references alone is ineffective in most cases. On the surface, one doesn't encounter the many layered and intricate congruencies that are necessary components of God's sovereign will and purpose. It's only by digging deeper that one can begin to see the wonder and connectedness of God's work in Jesus Christ. That is the approach this book has attempted to take, while at the same time lighting the pathway with lamp posts (the presuppositions), so that those who likewise study the topic are equally equipped to make an effective assessment.

## **The Church is Not Appointed to Wrath**

The first idea, that the church is not appointed to wrath, is a valid one. Consistency abounds in scripture and in the underlying will of God to create children of light through the redeeming work of his Son and our Lord, Yeshua the Christ. Yet even this requires further refinement, and we cannot accept Walvoord's claim in its general form. Though God demonstrates reconciliation and establishes peace with those who answer his call, the wrath he promises to save us from is his own wrath, not all wrath as Walvoord infers. God's wrath is necessary to ensure the fulfillment of his righteousness and justice; the wages of sin is death. Through acceptance of Yeshua the Christ and baptism, one passes from the certain death required of God's righteous judgment by the atoning death of our Lord and Savior. Since that death is satisfied in Christ, God's wrath is no longer a requirement.

Clearly though, this salvation offered through Christ Jesus is to save us from the second death, not the first. This is evidenced by the countless faithful who've died the first death and are buried. The reason Christ can say "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live," is because God is willing and able to resurrect those who've died the first death. This he has demonstrated by resurrecting his Son. There is no resurrection for those who die the second death, and only those who overcome the second death in Christ will be allowed into the Father's Kingdom (Revelation 20).

## The Great Tribulation is not God's Wrath Upon the World

The second claim to be assessed was that of viewing the Great Tribulation as part of the execution of God's wrath upon the world. Sufficient evidence has been presented to show this is not the case. However, underneath this claim lay several other erroneous ideas:

- *The only valid reference to the church is a direct one (ekklēsia).*  
Yet we saw in scripture that there are dozens of other nouns and adjectives used to refer to Christ's body of believers which are used repeatedly throughout the New Testament. Many of these were sufficiently unique that they could apply to no other group of people than God's faithful elect. These faithful God calls out of the world to do good works according to his will and purpose.
- *The path of redemption for Israel is completely separate and disconnected from that offered the Gentiles in this dispensation.*  
Though the expectation, participation, and even the timing for Israel's redemption is distinct from that of the Gentiles, both groups will see their salvation in Christ completed by the time his earthly reign ends. Israel's pathway, as directed by God, was essential to the inclusion of the Gentiles; the unity of the two men as Paul describes it (Ephesians 2:11-22). It was also

essential that they would be unknowing recipients of the mystery brought to light when the Messiah arrived. It is only through his arrival, death, burial, and resurrection that all humanity could be saved. This was not an afterthought on God's part. Though he does allow many in Israel to stumble over the very one they're anticipating, God doesn't reject them completely. He will lead them to belief and repentance.

- *The Great Tribulation is intended for Israel only.* For disobedient Israel the Great Tribulation serves as a time of correction as does God's wrath, yet he will not be angry with them always. He will pursue them and seek their repentance, offer them mercy and grace, forgive their sins, and make a new covenant with them – a covenant that leads to life eternal. It is the body of Christ, God's faithful elect, who have already attained salvation and the promise of eternal life through belief in the Son of God and the gift of the Holy Spirit. All their Savior requires of them is to remain faithful and to endure until he comes again. His imminent return will come sometime during the period of Satan's wrath and at a time of the Father's choosing. Christ's appearance in the sky is the single milestone that secures the lives of God's faithful elect and ends the reign of all earthly or heavenly powers and authorities.
- *The interval extrapolated from Daniel's Seventy-Weeks prophecy is the only valid filter through which to understand the Great Tribulation described in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.* This represents a more layered presupposition and space prohibits a thorough breakdown at this time. However, two underlying presuppositions from which the interval (or gap) of Daniel's seventieth week is supported<sup>1</sup> can be discussed further:
  - The church is in this dispensation only – a distinct body of believers
  - The olive tree illustration used by Paul in Romans 11 shows three clear stages: Israel in the place of blessing; Israel cut off and the Gentiles grafted in; the Gentiles cut off and Israel grafted in again.



Clearly these two presuppositions are connected, since it is through misunderstanding Romans 11 that Walvoord concludes the body of believers is distinct. He's focused on seeing division – which is necessary to support the dispensational and pretribulational model. Yet an unfiltered view of scripture shows Yeshua, the Christ as the unifying factor which binds together all those faithful to God. As stated earlier, the dispensational model seeks to divide that which Christ lived, died, and was resurrected to unite:

- The current dispensation expands, not divides, the distribution of God's grace to include the Gentiles.
- Faith, trust, and belief in God (which are a gift from God) transcends the covenants and dispensations

This is at the core of the mystery of God – something the dispensational model does not account for. The mystery of God is an additive and inclusive perspective rather than the subtractive and exclusive perspective of dispensationalism. The dispensational view of Romans 11 reflects this with further exclusion and subtraction.

- There is a complete failure to acknowledge the faithful remnant in Israel who remain a part of the olive tree. Recall that only *some* of the branches (Israel) were cut off. Also, one can't be grafted in among *the others* and share something with those who've been cut off. We are grafted in and stand fast through the same means as those who remain – faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel).

Romans 11:17-18a, 20

*But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches.*

*They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear.*

- The partial hardening which came upon some in Israel is the very means by which God brings salvation to all. This again is part of the mystery of God, hidden in Christ our Lord for their benefit and ours.

*Romans 11:12 – Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!*

- Lastly, the third stage of Walvoord's claim about the olive tree appears completely fabricated. At no time are the Gentile faithful shown to be cut off so that others could be grafted in or for any other purpose. There is a time of the Gentiles which does come to an end but it's not the same as being cut off.

Though it was only hinted to previously, another underlying purpose for the distinction between the faithful elect in Israel (Revelation 14:4) and the faithful elect of the Gentiles (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 1 Corinthians 15:20) is to establish the firstfruits of salvation for both groups. By distinguishing each firstfruit group separately, God declares their unique roles in his plan to redeem others; the firstfruits in Israel as an example to all Israel, and the firstfruits of the Gentiles as an example to the rest of the world.

How is it we can come to such a conclusion? Those who are intended to be the only would never be referred to as the first. You're only the first if others are to follow. Just as Christ is THE firstfruit of the resurrection, so are those who follow in Christ up

until the point when he establishes his earthly kingdom in Jerusalem. Recall that there is a blessing confirmed upon those in the first resurrection (Revelation 20:6). It's not called the first resurrection because it's the only. It's called the first because it precedes two or more resurrections.

Returning to the initial claim that the Great Tribulation is part of God's wrath upon the world, it's been clearly shown this is not the case. Using the heavenly signs of the sixth seal as the sign preceding the Son of Man, scripture provides a clear transitional event between the period of Satan's wrath (the Great Tribulation) and the appearance of Christ in the clouds. In an effort to deceive the world and undermine God's plan for humanity, those under the influence of Satan will draw the nations away from God and into greater deception. By showing up first, the Son of Lawlessness will seek to appear as though he is the returning Christ in an effort to lure away even God's faithful elect. They however are prepared; the children of light. They've heeded Christ's advance warning and command; see that no one leads you astray. Though pursued by this servant of Satan, they will not yield even unto death. Theirs is the blessed hope – the assurance of their resurrection in Yeshua, the Christ.

## **The Difference Between the Rapture and the Revelation**

Instead of the two distinct events that appear to separate the rapture of the saints from the revelation of Christ on earth to establish his kingdom, we've identified a series of related activities that comprise the full scope and purpose for our Lord's return to earth. Each of these activities is a necessary step in his plan to establish, prepare, and deliver the completed kingdom to his Father in the age to come. It is Christ's appearance that begins the process and brings about the end of the tribulation for his faithful elect.

Likewise it occurs at a time of God's choosing to fulfill his promise and resurrect those called, chosen, and faithful in Christ. This group of faithful stretches back to Abraham, Noah, and if God is willing, even to Adam. Only God knows all those who've lived faithful lives committed to him. The same can be said for those who've turned to Christ in the current age or those still alive at the time when Christ appears. It is their faith that will be rewarded with everlasting life. Whether these faithful live or die during the tribulation, their future is secure in Christ, having been sealed by God's Holy Spirit. This shows the faithfulness of God, who is able to resurrect them to eternal life.

By Christ's shout and authority, the heavenly hosts accompanying him will first gather the faithful dead, who are then resurrected to eternal life as he was. They are followed by those faithful servants of our Lord who've endured until the end. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, they are changed; transformed into children of light – *For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality*. Together these faithful souls are the firstfruits of salvation and inheritors of Christ's kingdom on earth.

As an example to the disobedient in Israel, God will also call to himself 12,000 faithful from each of the remaining tribes of Israel wherever their descendants reside among the nations of the world. These will be marked and sealed before Christ begins executing God's wrath so that they are not harmed. At some point before Christ sets down on the earth, they will be redeemed so that they can stand with him in Zion and at Jerusalem. Like the firstfruits of the Gentiles, these firstfruits to salvation in Israel will reveal a greater salvation than their forefathers imagined. Such is the graciousness of God. Together these firstfruits of Christ are the committed leadership in his kingdom on earth, which he now prepares to deliver to his Father at the end of the age.

To establish his kingdom on earth he must first subdue the nations

of the world. Up until the point of his arrival, the world is under the direct rule of the beast power and the false prophet. For a world deceived, the time of Christ's appearance will evoke great fear and anxiety in some while evoking anger and defiance in others. Some will see the Lord and repent. Many more won't see him as a savior. They'll see him as the enemy and will oppose him. They love the lie and the world upon which it is built. They will fight to defend it.

God's wrath is a time of correction; to humble the pride of the world and the powers behind it. Through this time of correction, the disobedient in Israel and the world will be called to repentance. Some will respond. Many more won't. They choose instead to fight and die for the lie. Yet even for them death is not the end. For it is given for all men to die once and then the resurrection to judgment – Christ's righteous judgment. That, however, is another story.

For the unbelieving in Israel, God will use the time of tribulation and the period of his wrath to correct them also – to show the futility and the powerlessness of the gods they chose to follow. Yet through that correction God will call for their repentance, extend grace to them and forgive their sin, and ultimately he'll restore them to their own land, where they will enter into a new covenant with the *Lord their Righteousness*.

This in part is one of the primary purposes behind Christ's earthly kingdom and reign – to lead the world into obedience to God. This will be accomplished first in Israel as an example to a world that oppressed them. Christ will gather them from the many nations to whom they were scattered and will set them once again in their own land. They will know peace, and no one will make them afraid. The Lord Yeshua will be their righteousness, and David will be a prince among them. They will be a model of the new covenant of God's grace and mercy to the nations of the world; so that the world may learn obedience and to trust in the God of life.

During Christ's thousand-year reign, both Israel and the world will

be led by faithful rulers committed to Christ and his righteousness. Together they will rule and bring all those willing into obedience to Christ. Then he will hand the kingdom over to his Father. His work finished, Yeshua will then usher in a new heaven and a new earth – for the old heavens and the old earth will have passed away.

## **The Doctrine of Imminence Does Not Require a Pre-tribulation Rapture**

It should be evident at this point that much of the focus on imminence for the pre-tribulation rapture perspective is tied significantly to its view that the Great Tribulation is part of God's wrath. Once these are properly separated, the focus on imminence is less significant. This is appropriate, since the scriptures we've already covered which do support imminence did so within the scope of uncertainty that Christ defined as the day or the hour.

The other issue with regard to predefined events undermining the imminence also vanishes, as it should. Jesus Christ repeatedly warned his disciples, and they in turn warned us with sufficient details, to be prepared for the approach of our Lord's return. When sequentially outlined as shown in the chapters of Section 3, our Lord's return stands out as a set of distinct activities from those of the Great Tribulation. These distinct activities support his work and goal to establish and prepare the kingdom to be handed over to his Father. The Great Tribulation is clearly Satan's attempt to undermine that work. Though he may appear to have succeeded, it is Yeshua, the Christ who ultimately reigns on earth, and it is he who has the keys to death and the grave. It is his intent that those called, chosen, and faithful to him stand in victory with him. They are the manifestation of God's faithfulness and righteousness; the firstfruits of the resurrection.

## **The Body of Christ is the Summation of Those**

## Faithful to Yahweh

The uniqueness applied to the church of this age is not entirely misplaced, though it is often over-emphasized. If we limit its exclusiveness to what scripture reveals, we recognize its only boast is that of being the firstfruits of salvation among the Gentiles. Yet even reaching for this claim Paul warns us not to be arrogant.

Romans 11:19-22

*Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.*

Let us cast aside this desire to be unique and stand apart from those who crucified our Lord. It was prophesied they would do so. God's grace is sufficient to graft them back into the tree which is Yeshua, the Christ. Is there any man who thinks he can withstand the will of God? Some will try, but their end is the second death. Instead, let us rejoice to see the Gentiles share in the mystery of God and the work of Jesus Christ as he unites the faithful of the first covenant with the faithful of the new covenant. Clearly it is faith in God which unites them. And it is through faith that the firstfruits of the new covenant are united with the firstfruits of the first covenant; one unified body, committed to a unified Godhead, properly equipped to glorify God and his Christ on the appointed day. These firstfruits, then, are properly equipped to share in the rule and leadership of the earthly reign of the King of Kings. He called us to share in the work to complete the kingdom; leading the world into obedience to God. Only then can it be handed over to the Father, where we will all rejoice in the new heavens and new earth. Let this be our focus, for it is the will of God.

It is the conclusion of this reader, then, that the pre-tribulation rapture does not stand on firm scriptural ground for four of these five fundamental points. If it had, I would be glad to join the chorus of saints in proclaiming its certainty. Instead, I find myself troubled for those whose faith will be challenged when, if they cling to this unscriptural teaching, the Great Tribulation comes and they remain.

May God guide each of you, by the power of the Holy Spirit, into a clear and confident understanding of his will in this matter, so that when that day does arrive, you can stand on the firmest ground – that is Christ Jesus.

## Notes

1. The Rapture Question – second edition, John F. Walvoord – The Church Age as Parenthesis (pg 25-28)





# Appendix-A

## Additional Scriptural Teachings that Contradict a Pre-tribulation Rapture

Where's the glory?

Another point that needs addressing is not an argument against a specific part of the pre-tribulation rapture but against the whole concept; that the Lord is coming to secretly rapture away his church. The reason this concept doesn't fit is stated clearly by one insightful person who is dear to me: So where's the glory if he's coming secretly?

As we saw in the previous section, not only is Christ returning in glory, but one of the purposes for the body of believers is to glorify God and Jesus Christ at his appearing. This is the will of God – for Christ and us. I see no alignment with a pre-tribulation rapture that secretly removes those alive in Christ and neglects the will of God.

Not only are we to glorify Christ, and he us, but all this is done for a reason. Reread the Fourth Gospel 17:20-23. As we saw before, one purpose behind it is the confirmation of our Lord. But who was the confirmation for? Who was to benefit from it?

- so that the world may believe that you did send me
- so that the world may know that you did send me
- and that you did love them just as you loved me

Where is the glory indeed. Not in whisking away his faithful, leaving the world to wonder how and why. Instead God will fulfill his purpose in us and for us – since it was to this purpose we were redeemed. (1 Peter 2:9)

*... redeemed to proclaim the glories of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

And are these glories to be proclaimed only in the kingdom our Lord is coming to establish? No. They will be proclaimed to the whole world at his appearing when he is glorified by his saints (2 Thessalonians 1:7, 10-12). At which time we will see him in his glory, and his prayer to his Father will be answered. (Fourth Gospel 17:24)

As long as the pre-tribulation rapture stands in conflict with the will of God – as we’ve seen in this and many other points – I can put no trust or faith in it. Each of us in the body of Christ must prove these things for ourselves. Trust the Spirit of God, and he will lead you into all understanding.

## References to the Body of Believers

As one makes a thorough study of the body of believers (the church) spoken of throughout scripture, it becomes clear that there is a very broad selection of nouns and adjectives used to describe it. If one is looking for only nouns or pronouns when referring to “the church”, you’re likely to miss a great deal. Though I have not calculated, I suspect those outlined below would more than outnumber the literal references to “the church”.

The following list is only a representation, a sampling of some of the nouns and adjectives describing the church or its members.

<b>Chapt:Vs</b>	<b>Adjective</b>	<b>Chapt:Vs</b>	<b>Adjective</b>
Rev 1:6	A spiritual kingdom	Phil 4:22	all the saints
1 Pet 4:16	a christian	1 Pet 5:14	all who are in Christ
John 17:2	all whom thou hast given him	1 Pet 2:9	a chosen people
1 Pet 2:9	a holy people	1 Pet 2:9	a congregation redeemed

Eph 2:22	a habitation of God	2 Thes 2:13	brethren
2 Thes 2:13	beloved of our Lord	Jude 1	beloved by God
Jude 17	beloved	Eph 1:3	blessed with spiritual blessings in heaven
Eph 4:12	body of Christ	Eph 5:1	beloved children
Eph 5:23	the body	Rom 9:25	beloved
Rom 11:17	branch of a wild olive tree (Gentiles)	1 Thes 5:8	children of the day
1 Pet 1:1	chosen ones	1 Pet 1:2	chosen by the foreknowledge of God
Jude 1	called and beloved by God	1 Cor 1:2	church of God
1 Cor 15:9	church of God	2 Thes 2:13	chosen to salvation
1 Pet 5:10	called to his eternal glory	1 Pet 5:13	chosen church
1 John 3:10	children of God	John 17:26	Christ be with them
1 Pet 2:9	called out of darkness into his marvelous light	Eph 1:4	chosen before the foundation of the world
Eph 1:11	chosen	Eph 2:19	children of the household of God
Eph 4:1	called	Eph 4:4	called
Eph 5:8	children of the light	Eph 5:23	the church
Eph 5:24	the church	Eph 5:25	his church
Eph 5:29	his church	Eph 5:32	his church
Rom 8:21	children of God	Rom 9:24	called ones
Rom 9:26	children of the living God	1 Thes 1:4	elected ones
Col 3:12	elect of God	2 Thes 1:10	faithful ones
Eph 1:12	first to trust in Christ	Eph 2:19	fellow citizens with the saints
Rom 9:23	avored vessels	1 Pet 4:10	good stewards of the manifest grace of God

Eph 2:5	God made us alive together with Christ	Eph 2:10	God's creation
Eph 5:27	glorious church	Matt 24:31	His chosen ones
2 Thes 1:10	His saints	Col 3:12	Holy and beloved
Rev 19:5	His servants	Rev 19:7	His bride
1 Thes 5:27	Holy brethren	1 Pet 4:17	house of God
Col 1:26	His saints	John 14:2	he who believes in Me
Eph 1:23	His body and confirmation of him	1 Cor 1:2	invited and holy ones
John 17:26	love of God be with them	1 Pet 2:5	living stones
1 Pet 2:9	ministers to the kingdom	Eph 1:5	marked with His love
Eph 1:11	marked	Eph 2:14-16	makes us one
Eph 4:25	members, one of another	Eph 5:30	members of His body
John 17:16	not of the world	Rom 9:25	My people
Eph 2:15	(a) new man	Rom 10:11	natural branches (Israel)
1 Pet 1:14	obedient children	John 17:21	one with us
Eph 4:4	one body and one spirit	1 Pet 1:1	pilgrims
Jude 1	protected by Jesus Christ	1 Pet 2:10	people of God
1 Pet 4:18	righteous	Eph 1:9	recipients of the knowledge of His will
Eph 2:6	raised up with Christ	Rom 8:19	sons of God
1 Cor 16:1	saints	Phil 4:21	saint in Jesus Christ
1 John 3:1	sons, and made us	1 John 3:2	sons of God
Jude 3	the saints	Jude 14	saints
1 Pet 2:11	strangers and pilgrims	Eph 1:1	saints and believers in Christ

Eph 1:13	sealed with the Holy Spirit	Eph 1:18	saints
Eph 2:6	seated with God in heaven	Eph 3:18	the saints
Eph 4:12	saints	Eph 4:30	sealed to the day of salvation
Eph 5:3	saints	2 Pet 2:9	those who revere him
1 Thes 4:16	those who died in Christ	Matt 24:22	the chosen ones
1 Cor 15:23	those who belong to Christ	1 Cor 15:18	those who have died in Christ
Phil 3:3	true people of circumcision	2 Thes 2:14	the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ
2 Tim 4:8	those who love his appearing	Hebr 9:28	those who look for him at his coming
Hebr 10:14	those who are sanctified	John 17:9	those whom thou hast given to me
John 17:24	those whom thou hast given to me	Eph 1:14	those who are saved
Eph 4:24	the new man	Eph 6:24	them that love our Lord Jesus Christ
Eph 5:17	understanding the will of God	1 Thes 4:17	we who are alive and remain
Acts 1:8	witnesses to me	Rom 8:23	who have the firstfruits of the Spirit
John 17:20	who believe in me	Eph 4:16	whole body closely and firmly united
Rom 10:11	whoever believes in him	Rom 10:13	whoever shall call on the name of the Lord
Rev 19:5	you who worship him	1 Pet 2:7	you who believe

# Appendix-B

## Challenging the Fifty Arguments for a Pre-tribulation Rapture

One segment of Walvoord's book, *The Rapture Question*, yet to be addressed is the chapter on fifty separate arguments that are intended to support the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine. The majority of these claims have already been addressed while others haven't. Since this book successfully challenges four of the five pillars supporting the pre-tribulation rapture teaching, we should find that the ideas reflected within these fifty arguments, and built upon those five pillars, are equally challenged. Also, a careful review of the fifty statements reveals that there are some duplicates whose wording is varied only slightly. These will be noted throughout.

1. *While posttribulationism appeared as early as 2 Thessalonians 2, many in the early church believed in the imminence of the Lord's return, which is an essential doctrine of pretribulationism.*

As we saw in Section 4 of this book, imminence is an essential part of our Lord's return at any time – pre-trib, post-trib, whatever. Why? Because we're reminded repeatedly in scripture the day and hour of our Lord's return is left to God's timing – outside of and overriding any preceding events.

2. *The detailed development of pretribulational truth during the past few centuries does not prove that the doctrine is new or novel. Its development is similar to that of other major doctrines in the history of the church.*

Since we found the doctrine to be in contradiction to scripture in four of its five core elements, this argument becomes less relevant. It is made historically irrelevant by the writings of George E. Ladd.<sup>1</sup>

3. *Pretribulationism is the only view that allows literal interpretation of all Old and New Testament passages on the Great Tribulation.*

This may appear to be the case from the pretribulationists point of view. Yet our literal review of the related scriptures did not conclude with a pre-tribulation rapture. In all honesty this reader found many of their “literal” translations to be based on subjective points of view. Hardly the case from which to found a doctrine of this nature. Especially considering that their literal translation failed to recognize the difference between the Great Tribulation and the Day of our Lord; two very different periods with opposing purposes by opposing forces.

4. *Pretribulationism distinguishes clearly between Israel and the church and their respective programs.*

Again, this distinction is not unique to pretribulationism. Section 5 of this book shows God has a clear plan for the nation of Israel, the Gentile world, and the body of believers. Each is achieved in a unique way and at differing times, but the result is the same. What pretribulationism overlooks is the unity in the body of believers across both covenants and God's plan to bring the nation of Israel into that same covenant. Walvoord wants to claim the church is unique at the expense and exclusion of the others. Clearly from scripture, Christ wants to do just the opposite.

5. *Pretribulationism maintains the scriptural distinction between the Great Tribulation and tribulation in general that precedes it.*  
This is not unique to pretribulationism nor does it directly support it. Though pretribulationism sees the distinction it fails to fully understand the underlying purpose behind that distinction and its role in the redemptive process.
6. *The Great Tribulation is properly interpreted by pretribulationists as a time of preparation for Israel's*



*restoration. It is not the purpose of the tribulation to prepare the church for glory.*

It is clear from scripture that God is using the circumstances of the Great Tribulation to complete his “time of the Gentiles” and lead Israel to repentance and acceptance of our Lord Jesus Christ. However, the second part of Walvoord’s statement – It is not the purpose of the tribulation to prepare the church for glory, has no scriptural basis provided here or in his book. In part he mistakes the Great Tribulation for the Day of the Lord. That together with not recognizing one of the key purposes for the body of believers is to glorify God and Jesus Christ at his appearing. This was detailed in Section 2.

7. *None of the Old Testament passages on the tribulation mention the church.*

This is not a valid argument for anyone who understands the full nature of the mystery of God revealed in Christ Jesus. The extending of God’s grace to the Gentiles was a mystery until Christ, so it’s consistent with God’s purpose that they would not be mentioned. Though indirectly they were mentioned (Genesis 49:8-10; Deuteronomy 32:16,19-21). This was covered in detail throughout the book.

8. *None of the New Testament passages on the tribulation mention the church.*

We’ll look at each of the scriptures he references, keeping in mind the pronouns and adjectives reviewed in Appendix-A. It’s also important to remember that when proving the church was exempt from wrath, Walvoord failed to notice that *ecclesia* did not appear in any of the scriptures he referenced. There it was acceptable and here it isn’t?

### **Matthew 13:30, 39-42, 48-50**

First of all, these scriptures could hardly be considered definitive scriptures on the tribulation – especially since they are parables. In addition, the context of the scriptures is

not the tribulation, but the kingdom – which isn't established until after Christ is revealed, gathers his saints, executes God's judgment and wrath, arrives to earth, then establishes his kingdom. These details were addressed in Section 3.

#### **Matthew 24:15-31**

This was covered in detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

#### **1 Thessalonians 1:9-10**

Who is Paul writing to if not part of the church – the church at Thessalonica. In verse 10 Paul includes himself in “us”, so are we to assume he is excluded from the body of believers?

#### **1 Thessalonians 5:4-9**

Here Paul is admonishing the church at Thessalonica (the Thessalonians). First calling them brethren, children of light, children of the day, we who are the children of light. Who else, other than the body of believers can put on the breastplate of love, or helmet of faith, or would have the hope of salvation?

But then verse 9 is the very verse Walvoord uses to claim the church was not appointed to wrath, but salvation. So why does he say now that it doesn't refer to the church?

#### **2 Thessalonians 2:1-11**

Sections 2 and 4 of this book details our findings regarding Paul's discussion here. As shown above, Paul is obviously speaking to a part of the body of believers – including himself in their company. If we view the context of the entire chapter, Paul clearly identifies who he is addressing – *brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.*

#### **Revelation 4-18**

It is a claim often made in the pre-tribulation argument that because the church is not directly mentioned in Revelation chapters 4 through 18 it shows the church has been raptured away prior to the events outlined there. This was discussed

in detail in Chapter 3. It's worth looking at a few, key examples.

- Revelation 5:8-10 speaks of the prayers of the saints, how they came from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and are redeemed by God. This does not fit as a description of the nation of Israel, but only of the body of believers. Verse 10 goes on to say that this body of believers shall reign on earth – certainly a role committed to the faithful. (2 Timothy 2:12, Revelation 20:6)
- Revelation 6:9-11 begins by illustrating the desire of those slain for Christ's sake to see his vengeance upon those who dwell on the earth. It ends with a prophecy regarding the current dispensation for the Gentiles – the time should be fulfilled and that their fellow servants should likewise be martyred. This martyrdom of believers during the tribulation clearly points to at least a subset of the body of believers, as one could hardly martyr a non-believer.  
NOTE: As explained in Section 3, it is clear that the body of believers, at least those alive at our Lord's return, witness the signs of his appearing (outlined in Revelation 6) and are gathered with him after those who have died in Christ are resurrected.
- Revelation 7:9-17 clearly speaks of a body of believers (washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb) and prevailed through the Great Tribulation. They have obtained their salvation and serve God in his temple. Details for this part of Revelation 7 were covered in chapters 8 and 11.
- Revelation 8 and 9 detail the wrath of God which begins after the seventh seal, delivered by a revealed Christ with his saints. These are the first 6 trumpet blasts which occur after the first resurrection. Revelation 9:4 refers to those men not sealed by God, inferring that those he did seal from the tribes of Israel (Revelation 7:1-8) occurred before and shall not be harmed.

- Revelation 10 speaks of preparation for sounding the seventh trumpet but is unclear as to when it actually sounds. The timing appears to be an interlude between the sixth trumpet and the seventh trumpet. This chapter focuses on the closing of the *time of the Gentiles*, which is part of the *mystery of God*.
- Revelation 11, also part of the interlude, shifts the focus back to Israel. This chapter doesn't follow the same timeline, but references a point in Revelation 9 when the bottomless pit is opened. At that time the two witnesses who have been given power to prophesy for 42 months (presumably the 3 ½ years of the Great Tribulation) are killed.

It would seem that this claim is not supported scripturally as there are clear references to the faithful body of believers up until Revelation 8 – by which time our Lord has returned and they are united with him.

9. *In contrast to midtribulationism, the pretribulationist view provides an adequate explanation for the beginning of the Great Tribulation in Revelation 6. Midtribulationism is refuted by the plain teaching of scripture that the Great Tribulation begins long before the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11.*  
This claim is not relevant to our discussion. See Sections 2 and 3.
10. *The proper distinction is maintained between the prophetic trumpets of scripture by pretribulationism. There is no proper ground for the pivotal argument of midtribulationism that the seventh trumpet of Revelation is the last trumpet in that there is no established connection between the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11, the last trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52, and the trumpet of Matthew 24:31. They are three distinct events.*  
This claim is not relevant to our discussion. This conclusion regarding the trumpets neither supports nor hinders the

pretribulational position.

11. *The unity of Daniel's seventieth week is maintained by pretribulationists. By contrast, posttribulationism and mid-tribulationists destroy the unity of Daniel's seventieth week and confuse Israel's program with that of the church.*  
This is essentially the same as argument #4.
12. *The translation of the church is never mentioned in any passage dealing with the second coming of Christ after the tribulation.*  
So let's first look at the two primary scriptures Walvoord cites as relating to the pre-tribulation rapture of the church and see what references, if any, are made to the timing of that rapture.

#### **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**

*For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, . . . and those who died in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet our Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with our Lord.*

As we saw in Sections 2 and 4, the context for these scriptures is the return of our Lord. Paul was attempting to reassure the Thessalonians about those who died in Christ. He makes it clear in verse 15, stating – *for this we say to you by the very word of our Lord*, that the timing of these events is to occur at – *the coming of our Lord*.

#### **1 Corinthians 15:51-53**

*Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all die but we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality.*

Previously in Chapter 5 we showed that the context for the timing of these verses is given earlier in verses 20-23 – Christ

at his coming. Further details were provided in Chapters 8, 9, and 10.

So it's important to note that even these two key references for Walvoord's argument for a pre-tribulation rapture – point directly to the single event recorded in Matthew 24 that occurs after the tribulation – the return of our Lord. As we saw in Sections 2 and 3, the hangup occurs because Walvoord fails to recognize the multi-phase aspect of Christ's return and wrongly assigns the tribulation to the Day of our Lord.

13. *The church is not appointed to wrath, so therefore cannot enter the Great Day of His Wrath.*

See argument #14.

14. *The church will not be overtaken by the Day of the Lord, which includes the tribulation.*

As we showed in Section 1, Walvoord's assertion that the church is appointed to salvation and not wrath is indeed scriptural. His further contention that the Day of the Lord includes the tribulation is not. This was shown in Section 2 to be two distinct and separate events, motivated by separate parties. Though God does indeed use the tribulation to bring the nation of Israel to repentance, it is clearly Satan and his beast power that brings about this time of distress.

15. *The possibility of a believer escaping the tribulation is mentioned in Luke 21:36.*

As we reviewed in Section 4 on imminence, verse 36 doesn't offer the escape from all this as some might imagine. This escape is achieved by remaining faithful and focused on our Lord through the turbulence that will be in the world. How can we have courage (mentioned in verse 28) in the midst of this upheaval? Because we'll be expecting the revealing of our Lord and the salvation he brings with him.

16. *The church of Philadelphia was promised deliverance from "the*

*hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.” (Rev 3:10).*

Here Walvoord correctly sees the context of this scripture as relating to the Lord's return but is mistaken in thinking it refers to the Great Tribulation. As we showed in chapter 11, there is sufficient evidence to support the period being referred to is the Day of the Lord. Since the pre-tribulation perspective doesn't distinguish properly between these two events, it can't distinguish properly the hour of trial. The purpose for testing the unbelieving Israelites and the unbelieving Gentiles is to produce a result (Hebrews 3:7-10). For some that result will be rebellion. The testing of the faithful comes before the Lord's return. For those faithful and enduring to the end (Matthew 24:13) the result will be a crown of life (James 1:1-3, 12; 1 Peter 1:6-7). Walvoord's claim that the church is promised "deliverance from" the hour of trial is more accurately understood in light of the gospel which requires endurance through trials. (Luke 21:16-19; Romans 5:3-5; 1 Timothy 6:11-12; James 1:1-4)

17. *It is characteristic of divine dealing to deliver believers before a divine judgement is inflicted on the world as illustrated in the deliverance of Noah, Lot, Rahab, etc.*

Though God's ability to rescue is evident and many examples are familiar to us, this perspective must be tempered with an awareness of the divine purpose behind each of these examples. Noah, for example, was delivered through the flood not from it. In the case of Christ's return, the purpose for his church – his body of believers, is well established in scripture. In Section 5 we discovered the many purposes for those who believe and trust God and his purpose for them is directly tied to our Lord's return as described in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. (1 Peter 2:20-21, 2 Thessalonians 1:10-12, Fourth Gospel 17:20-25)

18. *At the time of the translation of the church, all believers go to the*

*Father's house in heaven and do not immediately return to the earth after meeting Christ in the air as post-tribulationists teach. (John 14:3)*

The Fourth Gospel 14:3 is similar to Matthew 24:31, Hebrews 9:28 and 1 Thessalonians 4:17 in Christ's promise to gather together his body of believers to be with him wherever he is. This is a comfort to all who look for his appearance. This is not unique to pretribulationism.

The issue of – *do not immediately return to the earth*, is an area where Walvoord, McGee, and others fail to grasp the process involved with Christ's return. The phases of Christ's return are clearly outlined in Section 3, taken directly from scripture and ordered in a logical progression to fulfill the clear goals expressed by Christ himself. There is another reality the translation brings upon those redeemed at the Lord's return. This translation, as explained in Chapter 8, moves one from the physical realm (corruption) to the spiritual realm (incorruption). A consistent oversight by many is that those abiding in the spiritual realm are not subject to time (a dimension of the physical realm) in the same way they were prior to translation. There can be no firm argument over event timing for Christ or any who are with him in the spiritual realm since they will no longer be bound by that constraint. Though we know not to what degree, we know that we will be like Christ – for we shall see him as he is. It would be presumptuous to assume we will have the full capabilities of the Godhead – knowing the beginning from the end. There are reasonable explanations why this relationship to time is restricted to the Godhead which alone is said to be without beginning and without end.

19. *Pretribulationism does not divide the body of Christ at the Rapture on a works principle. The teaching of a partial rapture is based on the false doctrine that the translation of the church is a reward for good works. It is rather a climatic aspect of*



*salvation by grace.*

Though I don't disagree with Walvoord's conclusion, this claim is not relevant to our discussion.

20. *The scriptures clearly teach that all, not part, of the church will be raptured at the coming of Christ for the church.*

No argument here. In fact, an unfiltered reading of scripture indicates all includes those who are faithful to God. This includes those in history and those who endure the Great Tribulation.

21. *As opposed to a view of a partial rapture, pretribulationism is founded on the definite teaching of Scripture that the death of Christ frees from all condemnation.*

I would agree that scripture holds that faithfulness to God results in reconciliation and freedom from God's wrath. This reconciliation is clearly free from any condemnation. Yet I find it interesting that Walvoord recognizes this and still seeks to separate those faithful in Israel's past (the OT saints) with those faithful Gentiles today. Is it not the same faith in God? Did Christ not die for all the world? Did Israel have one God and we another? Is not faith the basis for reconciliation – given by the grace of God? Christ came to unite the faithful not divide them as Walvoord and the dispensational framework seeks to do.

22. *The godly remnant of the tribulation are pictured as Israelites, not members of the church as maintained by the post-tribulationists.*

That there is a remnant of Israel which are sealed by God is clearly stated in Revelation 7. As explained in Section 5 and elsewhere, the chosen, elected, saints of our Lord are alive and well during the tribulation and will glorify him at his appearing according to the will of God. Walvoord's assertion to exclude them only comes about because of the improper timing of the rapture as taught by the pre-tribulation doctrine.

23. *The pretribulation view, as opposed to posttribulationism, does not confuse general terms like elect and saints, which apply to the saved of all ages, with specific terms like church and those in Christ, which refer to believers of this age only.*

The issue is not confusion, but exclusion. Scripture clearly teaches, as we showed in Section 5, that Christ is building a unified body of believers that transcends the covenants and is inclusive for all who believe. Walvoord's view is one of exclusivity toward the church – as though the church of this dispensation stands alone. According to scripture, Gentile believers in this dispensation are the *wild branches* grafted into the *natural tree* already occupied by those in Israel who gained access through belief. Only the unbelieving in Israel were cut off. The division of the saints is necessary on Walvoord's part because of the improper timing of the rapture as taught by the pre-tribulation doctrine.

24. *The pretribulation interpretation teaches that the coming of Christ is actually imminent.*

As we saw in Section 4, the topic of imminence surrounding our Lord's return is not unique to the pretribulationist view. It is dictated in scripture by God's authority over the day and the hour of our Lord's return – of which no man knows. Christ specifically commands his disciples and followers to not be deceived regarding his return. Accordingly he provides an outline of events that precede his return so that we might have confidence and trust in him. The awareness and observation of these preceding events in no way undermines the imminence of his appearing since God will cut short the prescribed time according to his will and purpose.

25. *The exhortation to be comforted by the coming of the Lord is very significant in the pretribulation view and is especially contradicted by most post-tribulationists. (1 Thes 4:18)*

There is good reason for contradicting Walvoord's use of this verse in the way that he does. His use contradicts the context.

The comfort Paul is offering is not in response to his supporting arguments in verses 14-17, but in the subject of the discussion and the topic they were distressed about – verse 13: *Now I want you to know, my brethren, that you should not grieve over those who are dead, as those do who have no hope.* Is there comfort in the certainty that our Lord will return and bring with him our salvation? Certainly! But this context does not assure the timing of his return according to Walvoord's view – as scripture has shown repeatedly.

26. *The exhortation to look for “the glorious appearing” of Christ to His own (Titus 2:13) loses its significance if the Tribulation must intervene first. Believers in that case should look for signs.*

See argument #28

27. *The exhortation to purify ourselves in view of the Lord's return has most significance if his coming is imminent (1 John 3:2-3).*

See argument #28

28. *The church is uniformly exhorted to look for the coming of the Lord, while believers in the tribulation are directed to look for signs.*

This is another misdirection. By reviewing all the scriptures that Walvoord and other pretribulationists cite regarding the return of our Lord, the majority do not contain direct references to “the church” but use a wide range of adjectives, as we illustrated in Section 4, Section 5, and Appendix-A. Yet when Walvoord gets to scriptures relating to believers in the tribulation, all of a sudden these adjectives no longer reference the church. Again, we've shown there is no basis for this scripturally, but is another byproduct of improper timing of the rapture as taught by the pre-tribulation doctrine. By simply returning to the command of Christ to not be deceived, a command Walvoord overlooks completely, there is significance in both types of looking; looking for the signs which lead up to our Lord's return as we await the imminent appearance of our

Lord. Both aspects of awareness are not divided in their value or purpose when our focus is Christ.

29. *The Holy Spirit as the restrainer of evil cannot be taken out of the world unless the church, which the Spirit indwells, is translated at the same time. The tribulation cannot begin until this restraint is lifted.*

See argument #30

30. *The Holy Spirit as the restrainer must be taken out of the world before “the lawless one,” who dominates the tribulation period, can be revealed.*

It is interesting that Walvoord has concluded that the object restraining the man of sin from being exposed is in fact the Holy Spirit when there is no conclusive evidence to support such a claim. Here is an example where absence of information seems to attract supposition the way a black hole attracts matter. The suppositions on the character, nature, and makeup of what restrains is so varied it defies reason. There is another assumption occurring here and among others who venture into this void – that the object restraining the revelation of the man of sin is a global one instead of a local one. Local in the sense that it is only sufficiently restraining the man of sin from being exposed, as opposed to restraining all evil – which doesn't fit with reality. Also, Paul makes no inference of any kind that the removal of this restrainer would have any adverse effect on those to whom he was speaking or those like them.

If it were the Holy Spirit, why is Paul constrained from speaking of it clearly? This is one of the few places in Paul's writings that he seems to obscure what should be obvious, and unfortunately, that leaves the subject unanswered.

We can however conclude that Walvoord's position is flawed, by noting the following (as shown in Section 2, Section 3, and Section 4):

- the revelation and subsequent activities of the Son of

Perdition (Wicked One) precedes our Lord's return

- believers will continue through this period of time until our Lord appears
- any restrainer that is removed to expose the Wicked One affects him, not us – thereby rendering this argument pointless

31. *If the expression “except there come a falling away first” (KJV) is translated literally, “except the departure come first,” it would plainly show the necessity of the Rapture taking place before the beginning of the Tribulation.*

As previously discussed in Section 2, Section 3, and Section 4, there is much debate over the rebellion mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Some would translate it as “a falling away” or apostasy of the church, while others see it as a rebellion. By looking at the context of the sentence and the subject of the adjacent scriptures, it is this reader's view that the context more closely matches that of a rebellion against God – and by extension, those who believe in and trust in God. It's clear that the “Man of Sin” is referring to the beast power. The clear description of his anti-God attitude would be the catalyst to a global anti-God movement – resulting in families being split, betrayal, and hatred because of differing beliefs and the shift in power that the beast will control. Although this will certainly touch the church, I don't see in the context that the church is the focus or source of it. Walvoord would choose to translate this as departing in order to fit the rapture prior to the revelation of the Man of Sin, but it's an impossible fit when the context includes the rest of scripture.

32. *According to 2 Corinthians 5:10, all believers of this age must appear before the judgement seat of Christ in heaven, an event never mentioned in the detailed accounts connected with the second coming of Christ to the earth.*

Although this claim is not relevant to our discussion it warrants discussion. Obviously, Walvoord seeks to connect the

pre-tribulation rapture with our appearance before the judgment seat of Christ in heaven. Unless one was seeking a proof-text, how would one conclude that in order to stand before the judgment seat of Christ he must first appear? Nowhere in scripture, especially in this chapter, are the two connected, yet Walvoord concludes thus. Clearly this is the result of a presupposition brought to the text.

*2 Corinthians 5:10 – For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*

Paul goes on over the next several chapters reminding and admonishing the Corinthians for their proper conduct toward one another. Is there any clearer example of judgment on their part? How is it Walvoord, or anyone else for that matter, automatically assumes all judgment occurs at Christ's second coming? For the world this has certainly shown to be true. For the body of believers we are told there is no condemnation for those in Christ. And God's purpose for this in Christ? In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8)

Does not Christ bring judgment (or show justice) to the Gentiles (Matthew 12:17-21) through reconciliation with God? Is not Christ the intercessor (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:22-25) for those who believe? Who needs an intercessor except those who are under judgment. Is not each follower of Christ challenged daily in the scriptures to live according to the Spirit and to God rather than to the flesh and death? I submit and scripture supports that all called, chosen, and faithful in Christ gladly submit themselves daily to the righteous judgment of Christ in all things. How else can he complete in us the new creation and equip his firstfruits of salvation for priestly service in his kingdom? I thank God that through his Holy Spirit I can go

before the mercy seat of Christ for help and strength in time of need. But more than that, I am thankful I can learn and grow under the righteous judgment of Yeshua, the Christ – a righteous judgment that leads to life eternal. One who is in Christ doesn't have to wait for a future judgment; theirs is now.

33. *If the twenty-four elders of Revelation 4:1-5:14 are representative of the church as many expositors believe, it would necessitate the rapture and reward of the church before the tribulation.*

Following Walvoord's logic one would have to conclude likewise that Israel has been raptured since the expositors he refers to combine the twelve apostles with the twelve tribes of Israel – making them representative of both. But Walvoord clearly excludes Israel or any part of it from the church, this dispensation, and the associated rapture. If indeed the 24 elders are resurrected individuals, then it is their arrival in heaven upon thrones that precedes the tribulation, not the entire church. There remains far too little known in relation to them to make any sound judgment much less a formal doctrine.

34. *The coming of Christ for his bride must take place before the second coming to the earth for the wedding feast (Rev 19:7-10)*  
As was shown in Section 3, this is not an issue and does not require the interval Walvoord assumes. By distinguishing the process of Christ's return, according to what scripture reveals, the only interval that exists is from the time Christ appears to the time he sets foot on the Mount of Olives; the place he is promised to return to (Zechariah 14:1-9; Acts 1:11). Christ's appearance is mentioned in Revelation 6 and is associated with the sixth seal. His setting foot on earth isn't mentioned until Revelation 14 at the seventh trumpet. It is within that short interval that the returning Christ completes the following;

- Sends his angels to first gather the resurrected saints
- They then gather those alive and transformed to meet

Christ in the sky

- The 144,000 of the tribes of Israel are sealed and protected from God's wrath
- Christ executes God's wrath upon the disobedient and unrepentant of the world
- Christ has shared the wedding supper with the faithful – now clothed in fine linen, bright and pure (Revelation 19:6-8)

By discerning the varied purpose behind Christ's return and the process by which he accomplishes each purpose, one can, with an unfiltered view of scripture, see how Christ does come for his church before setting foot on earth. And all this can occur without conflict or a pre-tribulation rapture.

35. *Tribulation saints are not translated at the second coming of Christ but carry on ordinary occupations such as farming and building houses, and they will bear children (Isa 65:20-25). This would be impossible if all saints were translated at the second coming to the earth, as post-tribulationists teach.*

As we discussed in Sections 2 and 5, there is no division of the saints, chosen ones, elect, or the body of believers – but all are one body, purposed to glorify God and Jesus Christ at his appearing. We also saw how those coming through the tribulation alive are clearly identified as “translated” in Revelation 7. Walvoord's assertion here might be true if he is limiting the “tribulation saints” to those in Israel who come to believe in Christ, which is expounded in Romans 11 and elsewhere. It is clear also in Revelation 7 that a remnant of Israel (144,000) will be sealed and not harmed through the tribulation. So in one context of Israel, Walvoord's assertion is accurate, but not in relation to the body of believers awaiting their salvation in Christ at his appearing. The rest of Israel is promised restoration later. See argument #38 for details.

36. *The judgement of the Gentiles following the second coming (Matt*



25:31-46) indicates that both saved and unsaved are still in their natural bodies. This would be impossible if the translation had taken place at the second coming.

See argument #38

37. If the translation took place in connection with the second coming to the earth, there would be no need for separating the sheep from the goats at a subsequent judgement, but the separation would have taken place in the very act of the translation of believers before Christ actually sets up his throne on earth (Matt 25:31).

See argument #38

38. The judgement of Israel (Ezek 20:34-38), which occurs subsequent to the second coming, indicates the necessity of regathering Israel. The separation of the saved from the unsaved in this judgement obviously takes place sometime after the second coming and would be unnecessary if the saved had previously been separated from the unsaved by translation. These are each related so I'll cover them together by outlining the progression of events as shown in scripture. Some of this was covered in Section 2, Section 3, and Section 5 in more detail.

### **The Second Coming of Christ**

- Christ appears in the clouds of the sky and reveals himself to the world
- The 144,000 faithful in Israel are sealed and protected before the Day of the Lord commences
- He gathers his chosen ones (body of believers) both dead and alive up to that time and translates them from corruption to incorruption, from physical to spiritual
- Together with the saints (his translated chosen ones) Christ executes God's wrath upon the earth
- He arrives on earth at the Mount of Olives to intercede for Zion and Jerusalem

- He brings all nations under subjection to his rule and establishes his kingdom
- Israel is regathered as a nation from all around the world and given their land and Jerusalem in which to dwell in peace (Ezekiel 20:34-44, Isaiah 60, 61, 62, Jeremiah 30)
- Israel is given the same covenant afforded the Gentiles (Deuteronomy 30:3-6, Jeremiah 31:31-34)

During the time after his appearance and translation of his chosen ones, many will believe in Christ, yet will remain in the flesh – both Gentiles and Israelites. Matthew 25:31, as Walvoord pointed out, but somehow missed, is directed to the Gentile nations being gathered before him – not the body of believers. Another important element missing in Matthew 25:31-46 is the timing of the judgment. It clearly outlines the sequence of events, but indicates no time period over which they occur. Walvoord clearly expects this judgment to occur immediately after Christ's second coming. The sequence is correct, but not the timing. Compare this to Revelation 20 which recounts the first resurrection (of the chosen ones) and speaks of a pending second death. It then goes on to speak of the great white throne judgment – where those whose names are not written in the book of life, after being resurrected to physical form (the second resurrection), were cast into the lake of fire as part of this second death. Revelation 20 gives the timing for these events and it is clearly not immediately after Christ's return.

### ***Contrasts Between the Rapture and the Second Coming***

39. *At the time of the rapture the saints meet Christ in the air, while at the second coming Christ returns to the Mount of Olives to meet the saints on earth.*

We would agree with the first part of Walvoord's argument – *At the time of the rapture the saints meet Christ in the air*, since this is consistent with scripture as we've seen in Section 3. What we also saw in Section 3 was that the rapture and the

return to earth are each part of the same event occurring at the end of the tribulation after Christ's appearing. Here's the outline of the phases of that event as reviewed earlier:

- Christ's appearing in the air and revealing himself to all and to bring an end to the tribulation (the time of Satan's wrath)
- The gathering of his chosen ones, saints, by the heavenly hosts, and the sealing of the 144,000 of Israel
- His execution of God's wrath to subdue his enemies
- His arrival to earth at the place he ascended
- The establishment of his kingdom

It should also be noted that it's due to the attempt to separate these two phases of the same event that's at the heart of the issue. Christ does return to the earth, but it is to intervene for Israel and Zion as part of executing God's wrath prior to establishing his kingdom. The saints he's referring to at the Mount of Olives are the 144,000 spoken of in Revelation 14. It is clear from Revelation 7 that the 144,000 were sealed and protected until the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled. They were not translated at that time. Those saints translated at that time were those faithful who lived through the tribulation. That translation only occurs after the dead in Christ are resurrected first, which by itself, destroys the possibility of a pre-tribulation rapture.

40. *At the time of the Rapture the Mount of Olives is unchanged, while at the Second Coming it divides and a valley is formed to the east of Jerusalem (Zech 14:4-5).*

See argument #39

41. *At the Rapture living saints are translated, while no saints are translated in connection with the Second Coming of Christ to the earth.*

See argument #39

42. *At the Rapture the saints go to heaven, while at the Second Coming to the earth the saints remain on the earth without translation.*

See argument #39

43. *At the time of the Rapture the world is unjudged and continues in sin, while at the Second Coming the world is judged and righteousness is established in the earth.*

Technically this is true, even though Walvoord means a pre-tribulation rapture. In actuality, the phases of Christ's return are such that the rapture occurs second, after his appearing. Then the judgment and establishment of righteousness on earth follows as the remaining phases of his Second Coming are completed.

44. *The translation of the church is pictured as a deliverance before the day of wrath, while the second coming is followed by the deliverance of those who have believed in Christ during the tribulation.*

As we've seen in Section 2 and Section 3, Walvoord is technically correct about the first part. His mis-application occurs because he fails to distinguish between the tribulation, a time of Satan's wrath which ends at Christ's appearing, and the day of God's wrath which Christ executes. See argument #39 for additional details.

45. *The rapture is described as imminent, while the second coming is preceded by definite signs.*

As we saw in Section 3 and Section 4, the return of Christ is imminent under all scriptural conditions since God alone holds the timing of that event and no man knows the day or the hour – regardless of what events precede it.

46. *The translation of living believers is a truth revealed only in the New Testament, while the second coming with its attendant events is a prominent doctrine of both Testaments.*

It's surprising that with Walvoord's view of the church in this

dispensation and its relationship to the mystery revealed in them that he would think this argument is unique to the pre-tribulation perspective. Since the mystery, as we detailed in Section 5, was just that – a mystery – it should be no surprise to anyone that said translation would only be mentioned in the New Testament. It should be noted though that God gave hints of the mystery on earlier occasions (Genesis 49:8-10).

47. *The Rapture concerns only the saved, while the Second Coming deals with both saved and unsaved.*

See arguments #39 – #45

48. *At the Rapture Satan is not bound, while at the Second Coming Satan is bound and cast into the abyss.*

See arguments #39 – #45

49. *No unfulfilled prophecy stands between the church and the Rapture, while many signs must be fulfilled before the Second Coming.*

See arguments #39 – #45

50. *No passage dealing with the resurrection of saints at the second coming ever mentions translation of living saints at the same time.*

The only reason Walvoord can state this as an argument is his preassociation of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 and 1 Corinthians 15 :51-52 to a pre-tribulation rapture. In Section 3, Section 4, and Section 5 we saw clearly that the context of these two scriptures is certainly the second coming of Jesus Christ, making this argument immaterial.

## Notes

1. *The Blessed Hope*, George Eldon Ladd