“How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent Word! What more can He say than to you He hath said, to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?”

—George Keith

A Firm Foundation
Revised Edition

A Scriptural Study of
40 Major Doctrines
of the Christian Faith

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My sincere thanks to
Susan Evans, Karen McIver, Linda McSwain,
Janet Nicholas, Pirkko O’Clock and Carol Wilkinson
for their essential input into this book.
They share in its rewards.
—Charles P. Schmitt
Q  Why is the Second Coming of Christ called “the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13)?

A  Christian author James McConkey describes why our Lord’s glorious appearing is our blessed hope:

Suddenly in mid-heaven, without a second’s warning, is staged by God the most stupendous sight upon which human eyes have ever gazed—the outflashing, dazzling, awful splendor of the personal coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in His glory.

*The earth beholds* and thrills with the first ecstatic moment of her deliverance from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

*The angels behold* and cry, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.”
The saints behold and rise in rapturous joy to meet Him in the clouds of heaven.
The kings and princes of the world behold and cry to the rocks and hills to fall upon them and hide them from His presence.
The Anti-Christ beholds and falls palsied and helpless before the breath of His mouth and the glory of His coming.
The nations of the earth behold and cry out because of Him.
Not since the skies were stretched by the omnipotent hand of God in the ages that are past, has their blue canopy been the setting for such a scene as now floods them with its glory!

What is the rapture of the Church?

Marvin Rosenthal in his book, The Pre-wrath Rapture of the Church, explains the word rapture.

“The word rapture does not come from the Greek but from the Latin. It is the translation of the word rapere, meaning rapid. It appears in the Latin translation of 1 Thessalonians 4:7. There rapere, or rapid, is used to translate the Greek expression caught up. The words raptured, snatched or caught up have come to be used interchangeably. They are used to describe the initial phase of the Second Coming of Christ, who, by the word of His power, will snatch, catch up or rapture His true Church out of the gravitational pull of this planet to meet Him in the clouds and to remain forever with Him.”

What are the different positions currently held by evangelicals on when the rapture of the Church takes place?

Four positions on this doctrine are currently held by Evangelicals:

1. The pre-tribulation coming of Jesus and the secret rapture of the Church before the tribulation.
2. The mid-tribulation coming of Jesus and the rapture of the Church in the middle of the tribulation, before the days of God’s final wrath.
3. The pre-wrath coming of Jesus and the rapture of the Church toward the end of the tribulation, but before the days of God’s final wrath. This is a more finely-honed version of the mid-tribulation position.
4. The post-tribulation coming of Jesus and the rapture of the Church after the tribulation.

Concerning the rapture, what was the position held by the second-century fathers, those men closest to the original apostles?
The second-century mindset on the rapture was clearly *post-tribulation*. For example:

1. “Then the race of men will come into the fire of proving trial and many be made to stumble and fall. But those who remain established in their faith shall be *saved under the very curse*” (*Didache*, 16:5).
2. “Happy ye who *endure* the great tribulation that is coming on . . .” (*Hermas*, Chapter II, Vision II).

**THE FOUR POSITIONS**

**Q** What are the definition, the historical background and the scriptural support for a *pre-tribulation rapture*?

**A** The pre-tribulation rapture is understood as follows:

1. The historical background, as outlined by Marvin Rosenthal in *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*:

   The pretribulation rapture is the belief that Christ will rapture true believers before the tribulation period or seventieth week of Daniel begins.
   
   This position, widely held by many conservative premillennialists, is *relatively new* in origin. As an established view, it can be traced back to John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren in the year 1830. Some scholars have attempted to trace its origin back two years earlier to a charismatic, visionary woman named Margaret MacDonald. If the pretribulation rapture is used as a badge for orthodoxy, one is faced with the perplexing question of what to do with the millions of godly believers who, for almost eighteen hundred years, did *not* hold to a pretribulation rapture. Among them are men like John Wesley, Charles Wesley, Charles Spurgeon, Matthew Henry, John Knox, John Hus, William Carey, John Calvin, Isaac Newton, George Whitefield, A. B. Simpson, George Mueller, John Newton, Jonathan Edwards, John Wycliffe, John Bunyan and many others.

   The pretribulation view made its way to the United States in the 1880s, and with it, unfortunately, came friction and division. Men like Arno Gabelein, Harry Ironside, James Gray, Ruben Torey and Lewis Sperry Chafer were early champions of a pretribulation rapture. *The Scofield Reference Bible* of 1909 and the revised edition of 1917, which included a pretribulation rapture as a major part of its prophetic teaching, more than any other force popularized the pretribulation view of the rapture. Untold multitudes became pretribulationists as a result of Scofield’s notes which, because attached to his reference Bible, became highly authoritative in the minds of many. Most of the early Bible conferences, Bible colleges and seminaries, under the influence of those early pretribulationist leaders, adopted the pretribulation position, and the number of adherents continued to grow.
2. Seeming Scriptural Support and Responses:

- **Luke 21:36**—“Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.” A reasonable response to the word “escape” in this passage is that the word “escape” (Greek, ek-pheugo) means to flee out or flee forth, hence, translated: “to come safely through” (J.B. Phillips); “to pass safely through all these imminent troubles” (New English Bible); “Pray for strength to pass safely through these coming horrors” (Living Bible, margin).

- **1 Thessalonians 5:9** (see also 1:10)—“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Response: verse 8 tells us how this salvation from wrath comes—by putting on the full armor of God as Ephesians 6:13 tells us “so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground.”

- **2 Thessalonians 2:7**—“The secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.” The thought has been advanced that the “he” is the Holy Spirit in the Church, hence the pre-tribulation rapture; but this is an unfounded supposition. Response: Daniel, chapters 10-12 reveal that it is more likely that the restraining one is the strong archangel Michael.

- **Revelation 3:10**—“I will keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.” Response: The preposition *ek*, translated “from” can also be translated, “through” according to *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*. Consequently, the NIV footnote states: “The Greek for this phrase can mean either ‘keep you from undergoing’ or keep you through the hour of trial.” So also says the Living Bible footnote: It “is not clear in the Greek as to whether this means ‘from’ or ‘kept through’ the coming horror.”

The two main arguments for a pre-tribulation rapture, then, are these:

1. The saints will not endure the wrath of God, for Jesus bore that wrath for us. All the other positions actually concur with this!
2. The coming of Jesus is presented in the Scriptures as imminent. Webster’s defines imminent as “impending” and then defines “impending” as “about to happen.” The other positions concur, but do not believe that imminence precludes certain preparatory events.

**Q** What is the historical background and what is the main scriptural concern in the understanding of a mid-tribulation rapture?

**A** The mid-tribulation rapture is understood as follows:

1. Historical Background: “The mid-tribulation rapture is even more recent in origin than the pre-tribulation rapture. Scholars such as J. Oliver Buswell, Harold J. Ockenga and Gleason Archer championed this cause . . . . Many of its
followers see this as a *mediating* position. According to the mid-tribulation rapture, the *catching away* of the Church will occur three and one-half years into the tribulation period, immediately prior to the *Great* Tribulation. Therefore, mid-tribulationists would view their position as teaching that the rapture will exempt the Church from God’s judgment.”—Marvin Rosenthal

2. The Main Scriptural Concern:

- The main scriptural concern addressed by the mid-tribulation position is that the saints do *not* endure the wrath of God. In the Book of Revelation, the *seals* and the *trumpets* are viewed as expressions of the wrath of satan, and nature, and the wrath of man, but not the *wrath of God*. [Note: militarism (6:2); world war (6:3–4); famine (6:6); death and illness (6:7–8); hail-storm (8:7); the waters polluted (8:8–9); possible nuclear devastation (8:10–11); solar night (8:12) and a demonic invasion from hell (chapter 9).] The sounding of the *seventh trumpet* (in Revelation 11:15–18) corresponds to 1 Corinthians 15:51–52—“We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the *last trumpet*. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

- **Response:** The concern that, scripturally, the saints do *not* endure the wrath of God can be answered in one of two ways. The mid-tribulation rapture (or the pre-wrath rapture, which we will consider next) is one way, for it exempts the Church from the bowls of God’s wrath found in Revelation 16. Another way of addressing this legitimate concern about the saints not enduring the wrath of God is found in this simple thought: The bowls of God’s wrath are identical to many of the plagues that fell on Egypt just before the Exodus, the great Deliverance. The first bowl (painful sores) is the sixth plague on Egypt; the second and third bowls (waters turned to blood) are the first plagues on Egypt; and the fifth bowl (darkness) was the ninth plague on Egypt. Concerning the welfare of the people of God *during* these plagues on Egypt—they were kept safe by His mighty power; none of the plagues of His wrath fell on them! (See Exodus 8:22–23; 9:4–7; 9:26; 10:22–23; 12:12–13.) Jehovah, in the past, kept His people safe in the great trials that came upon the earth, and He will do so in the future!

**What is the pre-wrath rapture?**

**The pre-wrath rapture is really the mid-tribulation rapture more finely tuned.**

1. The pre-wrath rapture defined:

- The rapture of the Church will occur immediately prior to the beginning of the Day of the Lord.
- The Day of the Lord commences sometime within the second half of Daniel’s “Seventieth Week.”
- The cosmic disturbances associated with the sixth seal will signal the approach of the Day of the Lord.
The Day of the Lord will begin with the opening of the seventh seal (Revelation 8:1).

2. The same basic concerns (about not enduring God’s wrath) and the same scriptural considerations (only more finely tuned), earmark the pre-wrath rapture. This is a hybrid of the mid-tribulation teaching.

Q What then is the post-tribulation rapture and what are its scriptural supports?

A The post-tribulation rapture is defined and scripturally supported as follows.

1. Definition: The historic post-tribulation rapture position, which goes back to the early Church, believes that the Church will go through the entire seven-year tribulation period. At the end of that time of wrath, Christ will return to the earth. This view, unlike pre-tribulationism and mid-tribulationism, does not exempt the Church from the time of God’s wrath, but states that God will keep His own in the hour of trial as He kept Daniel in the lion’s den, the three Hebrew youths in the fiery furnace and Israel in the midst of the plagues on Egypt.

2. Scriptural Support:

- Perhaps the most powerful support for this position lies with the statements of our Lord Jesus Himself in His Olivet teaching, just before His death (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21).
  —See Matthew 24:29 (KJV) concerning when Jesus comes—“after the tribulation of those days . . . .”
  —See Mark 13:24–27 (KJV) likewise—“in those days, following that tribulation . . . .”
  —See also Luke 21:25–28—“At that time [the time of great tribulation], they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

To counteract these plain statements, the supposition is advanced that these Olivet teachings by Jesus were for Jews who were converted to Christ during the tribulation, after the Church was raptured. There is no internal evidence to support this supposition; and Matthew 28:19–20 contradicts this dispensationalist thought. The Olivet teachings, according to Matthew 28:19–20, were to be for the whole Church not solely for the Jews.

- Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:51–52, places the rapture of the Church at the last trumpet, as does Revelation 11:15–18, and there cannot be a trumpet after the last!

- Revelation 7:9, 14 describes an innumerable company of saints from every nation, tribe, people and language who “come up out of the great tribulation”—and such a vast harvest of souls cannot happen without the Holy Spirit and apart from the labors of God’s end-time army, which He is presently raising up in all the earth! [The fanciful supposition of where these “tribulation saints” could otherwise have come from is almost amusing!]
Just before the final bowl of wrath is poured out upon the earth (Revelation 16:15–17), the statement is made: “Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and shamefully exposed.” This is a clear reference to the Church.

In Revelation 20:4–6 we are told that the “first resurrection” occurs at the end of the Great Tribulation, and it includes “those who had been beheaded because . . . they had not worshipped the beast nor his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands.” And there cannot be a resurrection seven years or even three and one-half years before the “first” resurrection!

Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–8 declared that the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and the rapture cannot take place until the great apostasy has first happened and the man of sin (the Anti-Christ) is first revealed (verse 3), not before. Paul also declared that the Church will get “relief” from persecution and tribulation only “when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels [to] punish those who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel . . .” (2 Thessalonians 1:7–8) (and not seven or even three and one-half years sooner)!

Apart from the above four views, there is also the not very widely held “partial rapture” teaching in which the prepared saints go up before the tribulation, and the unprepared saints are perfected through the tribulation.

CONCLUSION: Only pampered, effete western Christianity can afford to believe in an end-times that is exempt from trial. The scores of millions who suffered unto death under atheistic communism did not have that luxury! And with the promise of God’s final end-time outpouring upon us, and before us the greatest harvest of souls ever, armed with the clear teachings of Holy Scripture (assuring us that we will be kept from His wrath in the Day of Trial) who would even want to be taken off the scene? (Please see Appendix One and Appendix Two.)

SUMMARY

In Matthew, chapter 24 our Lord Jesus Christ told us clearly that He would return and when He would return! His Coming is our blessed hope, as we wait for Him to gather and assemble His elect from one end of heaven to the other, and then having assembled them, to descend with them as His mighty army to overthrow every vestige of evil and to openly establish His glorious Kingdom on the earth! Amen!

PRAYER

O Lord Jesus, enable us by Your Spirit to “occupy until [You] come”! We await Your return! We joyously herald Your soon appearing in power and great glory! So shall we forever be with You, our precious Lord! Amen and Amen!
APPENDIX ONE

When Our Lord Jesus Will Return

—adapted from The Day Christ Returns by Leo Harris

At the Last Trumpet

In 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 (KJV), we read, “Behold, I show 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 trump for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” So the trump is the last trumpet—a climax to all previous trumpets.

We read in Matthew 24:31 that the angels will be sent forth with the sound of a trumpet to gather together the elect to meet the Lord. As there is no trumpet after the “last,” it must be the same trumpet that sounds when the dead in Christ are raised and living believers are translated.

When all false Christs and false prophets have had their day (Matthew 24:24) when the tribulation is over (verse 29), then the last trumpet will sound to call the Church to meet her returning Lord (see Revelation 11:15, 18).

The Apostle Paul tells the Thessalonians of this great reunion of all believers, dead and alive, when together they meet Christ as He descends through the air: “The dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17, KJV).

This will be the triumphant climax of the entire Christian era. In glorified, immortal bodies, released from the pull of gravity that has long bound man to this sin-cursed planet, believers of all generations will meet the Christ they have loved, served and followed—and for whose sake millions have gladly surrendered their lives.

The Pre-tribulation Theory

It is unfortunate that we must here deal with comparatively recent theories which have confused the minds of Christians concerning this blessed event of that Paul writes. J. N. Darby, the founder of the movement known as “Plymouth Brethren” in 1830, accepted the theory that Christ would come secretly in the air to snatch the Church from the earth before the time of tribulation foretold in many prophecies, and that the Lord would return with His Church to the earth at the end of the seven-year period.

This “secret rapture” theory was then read into many passages of the Bible, and this teaching gained popularity as it was linked with the evangelical teachings and evangelistic fervor of the Brethren movement, and later of other evangelical churches. The notes in the Scofield Reference Bible, so popular among evangelicals, also played a great part in promulgating the secret rapture theory.

But today there is a great body of believers worldwide who have returned to the plain and straight-forward teaching concerning this climactic event of the
age, without the confusion and manipulation of texts that the secret rapture theory requires. Let us briefly consider a few points that throw light on this difference of interpretation.

Returning to 1 Thessalonians 4:17, we shall examine the expression “to meet the Lord in the air.” The word “meet” is a Greek word, *apantesin*, which is used only here and in three other places, all of which mean to *meet as an escort*, to *meet and return with*.

In Matthew 25:1, 6 the virgins were to go forth to *meet* the bridegroom. According to their customs, they would *meet and return as an escort* with the bridegroom to the wedding feast. In Acts 28:15, the brothers had heard that Paul was on his way to Rome. These brethren went to *meet* Paul and *escort* him to Rome. In our text, 1 Thessalonians 4:17, we have the only other occurrence of this word *apantesin* and with precisely the same meaning. The saints will be caught up to *meet* the returning Christ, and return with Him as an *escort* to the earth. And so they shall be forever with the Lord, in glorified bodies, to live and reign with Him in His kingdom.

**Who Will Be in the “First” Resurrection?**

The pre-tribulation, secret rapture theory is that Christ will raise the dead believers and translate living believers secretly, *before* the time of tribulation foretold in the Book of Revelation, and then return with the glorified Church to the earth at the *end* of the tribulation.

Revelation 20:4–5 (KJV) gives us a specific time table for the resurrections: “And I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. *This is the first resurrection.*”

Now the “first resurrection” is the resurrection of those who are Christ's, the “dead in Christ,” and includes some who were martyred by the Anti-Christ, and there can be no resurrection of saints before the *first!* For this reason, the *first* resurrection occurs at the end of the tribulation.

1 Corinthians 15:23 (KJV) also gives us the order of the resurrections: “But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward *they that are Christ's at His coming.*” This will be the first resurrection.

Now read Revelation 20:4 again and see who is included in this *first* resurrection. Tribulation saints indeed. They had not been taken to heaven seven years before. They had lived and suffered and died and are now raised.

There can be no trumpet after “the *last trump*” (1 Corinthians 15:52, KJV), and there can be no resurrection before the *first resurrection*. And that first resurrection at the last trump includes the saints who suffer under the reign of the antichrist.
1 Thessalonians 5, the Day of the Lord: How and When Will It Come?

Two Groups of People and How They Will Be Affected.

Turning to 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5 we find Paul writing about conditions on this earth immediately prior to the coming of Christ as described in chapter 4. “But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the Day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, 'Peace and safety'; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape” (verses 1–3, KJV).

As a Thief

This day will come “as a thief in the night.” This term is used by some to illustrate the secret rapture of the Church, suggesting that Christ will come as a thief to snatch away the Church. However, this term is used in the Bible to illustrate suddenness. As a thief springs suddenly on his unsuspecting victim, so the Day of the Lord will burst with sudden unexpectedness on the ungodly world. In fact, they will just be claiming to have solved all problems, perhaps having signed peace pacts and crying, “Peace and safety at last!” when Armageddon will break loose and the wrath of God will be poured out.

Two Groups on Earth

As we read carefully the first 10 verses of chapter 5, it becomes clear to us that, at the very time that the Day of the Lord burst on the world, there will be two groups of people on the earth. They will be the unbelievers and the believers, the ungodly and the godly, the world and the Church. One group is referred to by the pronouns they, them and others. The other group is called ye, we and us. In verse 3, “they . . . say, ‘Peace and safety’ . . . sudden destruction cometh on them . . . and they shall not escape.” In verse 7 they sleep in darkness, and they are drunken. On the other hand in verse 4, “Ye, brethren, are not in darkness that this day [the Day of the Lord] should overtake you as a thief!” In verses 5–6: “Ye are . . . children of light . . . We are not of . . . darkness, so let us not sleep, . . . but let us watch and be sober.” And in verse 9, “God hath not appointed us to wrath,” but to be delivered by the coming of Christ!

That day will come as a thief, with devastating suddenness, on the ungodly world, but it will not come as a thief to those who believe, and who are watching, and who know by the signs of the times that the Day of the Lord is at hand. “God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake [are alive] or sleep [have died], we should live together with Him” (1 Thessalonians 5:9–10, KJV). We need to note that the deliverance from God’s wrath comes from putting on the armor of God (verses 8–9) and not from a pre-tribulation rapture! Praise God!

Background to the Second Epistle

After delivering Paul’s first epistle to the Christians at Thessalonica, Timothy returned to the apostle with the news that the Thessalonians were suffering
severe persecution for their Christian faith. Moreover, false teachers had led them
to believe that the Day of the Lord was at hand, and that Christ’s Second Coming
would occur at any time, with the result that many had left their employment and
were idling away their time while awaiting the return of the Lord.

Paul’s second epistle was then written to correct these errors in understanding
and wrong attitudes. In the first chapter he assures them of their deliverance
from tribulation at the coming of Christ, but in chapter 2 he warns that there
were certain events that had to transpire before Christ could come, and in the
third chapter he exhorts them to return to their normal employment while
awaiting the coming of the Lord.

2 Thessalonians 1—The Very Day Christ Returns What Will Happen to
the Ungodly? What Will Happen to Believers?

In 2 Thessalonians 1 (KJV), the Apostle Paul commends the believers for their
“patience and faith in all [their] persecutions and tribulations that [they] endure”
(verse 4). He assured them that a day of deliverance and vindication was coming,
saying, “Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them
that trouble you; and to you who are troubled [the persecuted Church] rest with us .
. .” (verses 6–7). Blessed day! All persecution and tribulation over for the believers,
and righteous retribution for the ungodly persecutors. And that day is still future.
When will it be? Exactly when will the Lord deliver His Church from persecution?
and tribulation? In our exposition of Paul’s first epistle we considered the theory
held by some that Christ’s coming is to be in two phases—the first to take the
Church to heaven, and the second some years later when He returns with the
Church to bring judgment on the ungodly world. We explained why this theory is
unacceptable. Here now we have a clear-cut statement by the inspired apostle
showing that deliverance and rest for the Church will occur on the very same day
that Christ brings fiery judgment on the ungodly world. God will “recompense
tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled [He will give] rest
with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels.
In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the
Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . . When He shall come to be glorified in His
saints, and to be admired in all them that believe . . . in that day” (verses 6–10). The
word “when” appearing in that passage indicated plainly that all these events occur
at the same time. Christ will come and give His Church rest from tribulation at the
very same time that He comes in flaming fire, taking vengeance on the ungodly.
Nothing could be more clearly expressed! Just as “the same day that Lot went out of
Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all” (Luke
17:29), so Christ will catch away the Church to meet Him in the air while the angels
administer the fiery judgments of God on the world. On the same day!

Who Will Be Punished, and How?

They who “know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus
Christ . . . shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of
the Lord, and from the glory of His power” (verses 8–9).
When Christ returns He shall “send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” Such are the words in the parable of Jesus in Matthew 13:41–42 (KJV).

Christ Glorified in His Saints

Verse 10 opens with the second “when,” which links these events together in point of time. It reads as follows: “When He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, because our testimony among you was believed in that day.”

In that day! The same day on which the Lord brings righteous retribution against the ungodly persecutors of the Church, punishes those who refuse the knowledge of God and of the Gospel, and gives rest to the Church—on this very same day Christ will be gloried in His saints!

These shall appear with Him in glory, in resurrection bodies, having discarded the tattered rags of mortality and having, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, donned the glorious garment of immortality.

2 Thessalonians 2, 3 (KJV)—The Rise of the Man of Sin and the Return of Christ—What and When Is the Prophesied “Falling Away”? What is the Restraining Power? Who Is the Man of Sin? When Does the Rapture of the Church Take Place?

Now let us examine this very vital prophecy in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2. The apostle wrote to correct a false impression in the minds of the Christians at Thessalonica that the Day of the Lord had already come and the return of Christ was at hand. “Now we beseech you, brethren, concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the Day of Christ is at hand” (verses 1–2).

The Order of Events

Paul then set out the order of events that would lead up to the return of Christ as follows: “. . .that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed . . . and now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth [hindereth] will let [hinder], until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked one be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming.” (vs. 3, 6–8). It is thus seen clearly that the order of events as set out by the apostle is like this: (1) the falling away, (2) the removal of a certain hindering or restraining power, (3) the revelation of the man of sin and (4) the Second Coming of Christ at which occurs the rapture of the Church (verse 1) and the destruction of the man of sin (verse 8). Let us now examine these events in a little more detail.
The Falling Away

The Authorized Version has “a falling away,” whereas the literal Greek is the apostasy. It was not just any apostasy, but the definite article, the, indicates a specific and major apostasy from the Christian faith.

The Restraining Power

Many Evangelicals have followed the theory put forward by the Plymouth Brethren movement and expressed in the notes of the Scofield Reference Bible that the restraining power is “the Holy Spirit in the Church” which, they say, is to be taken out of the way at the time of the rapture of the Church, and then the man of sin will be revealed.

Let us see why it cannot be “the Holy Spirit in the Church.” Whatever the restraining power was, Paul had told the Thessalonians while he was with them: “Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth . . .” (verses 5–6). Whatever the restraining power was, they were told about it during Paul’s visit to Thessalonica and knew about it! According to Daniel, chapters 10–12 mighty angels are used by God as restraining powers in the kingdoms of this world and among spiritual authorities in the heavenlies. More than likely one of these, Michael, is the restraining one; we know the restrainer could not be the Holy Spirit because of the tremendous outpouring of the Spirit and the worldwide revival that takes place during those very days (see Revelation 7:9, 14). The Holy Spirit is very much present in the earth in these days! He is not gone. He is here and at work!

First, the apostasy will be an attractive deception of the Gospel. It will be headed by a man making tremendous claims. This man will exalt himself, but he will oppose God’s message in the Gospel. He will even pretend to be God.

Paul said the man of sin would “sit in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (verse 4). “Anti-Christ,” literally, does not mean one opposed to Christ, but one who takes the place of Christ. (We see how the Greek “anti” is used in Matthew 2:22, where we read, “But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod . . . .” The four words, “in the room of,” are translated from the one Greek word, “anti.” We could, therefore, say that Archelaus was anti-Herod, for he took the place of Herod and reigned in his stead.)

In precisely the same way, anyone who takes the place of Christ, claiming the rights, privileges and authority of Christ is very definitely Anti-Christ!

Paul wrote about deception, strong delusion and believing a lie (verses 9–12), the only answer to which is a company of Bible-believing, Spirit-empowered Christians, of any and all denominations, proclaiming the full Gospel of Christ, and preparing people for the day of His glorious Second Coming!

Our Gathering Together unto Him

This will be the next great event on God’s program—the return of Christ and the gathering of the true Church into His presence. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1 we read about “the coming [Greek, parousia] of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him [i.e., the rapture].”
Then in verse 8 we read how the Lord will deal with the man of sin “whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming [Greek, *parousia*].” How plain it is then that at one and the same event—the coming (*parousia*) of Christ—the saints will be gathered unto the Lord and the man of sin will be destroyed.

On what authority can anyone say there are seven years between these events, and that the “coming” of verse 1 is different from the “coming” of verse 8? We have seen that the resurrection of the Christian dead and the translation of living believers takes place when Christ comes to dispense the judgments of God on the ungodly world. The order of events will be: (1) a great religious apostasy, (2) the removal of a restraining power, (3) the revelation of the man of sin at the head of the religious apostasy and (4) the coming of Christ with the gathering of the true Church to greet Him in the air, and the outpouring of God’s judgment on the man of sin.

**A Final Prayer**

We conclude this study by quoting 2 Thessalonians 3:5, in which appears Paul’s last mention of the Second Coming in these epistles: “And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.”

Let us live for the Lord and dedicate ourselves to His service until *the day Christ returns*! Amen!

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**APPENDIX TWO**

*Left Behind*

**SOME WILL BE; THE IMPORTANT QUESTION IS WHEN**

—by Charles P. Schmitt

The multi-volume series *Left Behind*, written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, has appeared on the *New York Times* best seller list and was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine. That people in the world should take such an interest in the last days and in the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is very encouraging; and for that I am grateful to the Lord. Among the Church, however, as wise stewards of the mysteries of God, certain important questions need to be asked; primarily, is LaHaye’s and Jenkins’ timeline of end-time events accurate? We know that some are going to be “left behind” according to Matthew 24:40–41; but the important question is, *when*.

LaHaye and Jenkins have based their books on the theory that seven years before the glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ, faithful Christians will be raptured—translated, caught up to heaven. This understanding has been known as the “*pre-tribulation rapture*.” Legitimate concerns about the *pre-tribulation rapture* are that it rests upon questionable biblical interpretation and, historically, it found its way into the evangelical mainstream only in the mid 1800s. Millions of godly, evangelical believers, for almost 1,800 years did not
believe in a pre-tribulation rapture—among these, men of apostolic stature such as John and Charles Wesley, Charles Spurgeon, Matthew Henry, John Knox, John Hus, William Carey, John Calvin, Isaac Newton, George Whitfield, A. B. Simpson, George Mueller (who is reported to have stated, “If you can show me a trumpet after the last [1 Corinthians 15:52] and a resurrection before the first [Revelation 20:4–5], then I can believe this new doctrine.”), John Newton, Jonathan Edwards, John Wycliffe, John Bunyan and many others. And as far as the post-apostolic, early Church fathers go—they apparently did not believe in a pre-tribulation rapture either! They write—“Then shall the race of men come into the fire of proving trial and many be made to stumble and fall. But those who remain established in their faith shall be saved under the very curse” (Didache; 16:5).

“Happy ye who endure the great tribulation that is coming on . . .” (Hermas; chapter II, Vision II). Irenaeus (disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of John the Beloved) comments in his Against Heresies (5.25.3) concerning the reign of the Anti-christ, that “this tyranny shall last, during which the saints shall be put to flight . . .” And Augustine, commenting on Daniel 7:21, states, “He who reads this passage even half asleep cannot fail to see that the kingdom of Anti-Christ shall fiercely, though for a short time, assail the Church.”

Gerhard Pfandi, Ph.D., associate director of the Biblical Research Institute, in an excellent article, “The Rapture—Why It Cannot Occur before the Second Coming,” traces some of the roots of the pre-tribulation rapture teaching:

The roots of this theory may be traced back to the time of the Counter-reformation. The Protestant reformers in the sixteenth century identified the papacy as the Anti-Christ of prophecy. [“I believe the pope is the masked and incarnate devil, because he is the Anti-Christ,” Luther stated. The reformers, were therefore, apparently not pre-tribulatists.] Several Jesuit scholars undertook the task of defending the papacy against these attacks, among these Cardinal Bellarmine (1542–1621), head of the Jesuit College in Rome and the Spanish Jesuit, Francisco Ribera (1537–1591) who projected the Anti-Christ prophecies to a future Anti-Christ who would appear in the time of the end and continue in power for three and a half years. Ribera’s futurism laid the foundation for dispensationalism. John Nelson (J. N.) Darby (1800–1882) is usually regarded as the father of dispensationalism. Darby developed an elaborate philosophy in which he divided history into eight eras or dispensations, “each of which contained a different order by which God worked out His redemptive plan.” Furthermore, Darby asserted that Christ’s coming would occur in two stages. The first, an invisible “secret rapture” of the believers, would end the great “parenthesis,” or Church age, which began when the Jews rejected Christ. Following the rapture, the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel would be literally fulfilled, leading to the great tribulation, which would end with the Second Coming of Christ in glory. The doctrine of the pre-tribulation
rapture was disseminated around the world, primarily through Darby’s Brethren Movement [and men such as Arno Gabelein, Harry Ironside, James Gray, etc.] and the Scofield Reference Bible [for untold multitudes became pre-tribulationists as a result of Scofield’s notes, which, because attached to his reference Bible, became highly authoritative in the minds of many.] In the twentieth century the theory was taught in schools like Moody Bible Institute and Dallas Theological Seminary. Hal Lindsey’s *Late Great Planet Earth* and many books of a similar nature further propagated the secret rapture theory.—*Adapted from* Ministry, September 2001

Other scholars also cite the 1820’s Irvingite charismatic visionary, Margaret MacDonald, as another of the sources of modern-day pre-tribulationism.

**But What Did Jesus and the Apostles Teach?**

Jesus' final teaching on His Second Coming, given on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, and recorded in Matthew 24 and 25, Mark 13, and Luke 21, is extremely clear. (And if anyone should know the times and seasons of His return, Jesus surely would!) In Matthew 24, there is **no Second Coming and no rapture** until “immediately after the tribulation of those days . . . [for] then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:29–31 (KJV); Mark 13:24–27; Luke 21:25–28). Luke, in 21:36, gives one additional charge: “Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape [translated as “pass safely through,” in the Living Bible margin, and in the N.E.B., and as “come safely through,” in J.B. Phillips] all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

And so our Lord sought to prepare His disciples for His coming, and in the process told them exactly when He was coming—“after the tribulation of those days,” and how not to be caught unawares.

Dispensationalism, which appears to rebuild the dividing wall between Israel and the Church (that very wall that Jesus died to destroy according to Ephesians 2:11–22), dismisses these words of Jesus in Matthew 24 as pertinent only “for the Jews”—but Jesus, in Matthew 28:19–20, when He commissioned His disciples to go into **all the world** and “make disciples of **all nations** . . . ,” commissioned them to teach **all these nations everything** He had commanded them, and that included the truths of Matthew, chapter 24 concerning His return!

**What Were the Apostles’ Understandings?**

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 places the rapture of the Church “at the last trumpet,” as does John in Revelation 11:15–18: “The seventh angel sounded his trumpet [and this is the last one], and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He will reign forever and ever . . . . *The time has come* for judging the dead, and for rewarding Your servants the prophets and Your saints and those who reverence
Your Name, both small and great . . . .” Obviously, all of this takes place at the end of the tribulation period, after the blowing of the seven trumpets of judgment.

In Revelation 3:10, Jesus had promised: “I will keep you from [which preposition is better translated “through”] the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test those who live on the earth.” (The Greek preposition used here according to the NIV footnote and the Living Bible footnote “can mean either ‘keep you from undergoing’ or ‘keep you through the hour of trial.’”) The weight of the rest of New Testament teaching leans in favor of the translation: “keep you through the hour of trial.”

In the midst of the bowls of wrath, just before the final bowl, this word is given to John in Revelation 16:15, obviously for the saints: “Behold I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.”

In Revelation 20:4–6, the first resurrection is clearly described (and remember, there cannot be a resurrection seven years before the first resurrection, or the first resurrection would not be the first!) In this first resurrection are found “those who had been beheaded because of their testimony . . . for they had not worshipped the beast [the Anti-Christ] or his image . . .”; so the rapture and the first resurrection apparently are at the end of the great tribulation, after the reign of the Anti-Christ and not before!

From the Book of Revelation, an argument for a pre-tribulation rapture has been advanced by some, insofar as the word “church” per se was not used by John between chapters 4 and 21; their reasoning being that the Church is not present in the earth during these chapters. The facts are that these are highly symbolic chapters, abounding with figures of speech for both Jesus and His Church, and that the Church does appear in the symbolism of these chapters as the “saints,” the “kingdom of priests,” the “great multitude,” the “candlesticks,” the “firstfruits,” God’s “people,” the “bride,” the “armies of heaven,” the “new Jerusalem,” etc., even as Jesus Himself appears with numerous symbolic names also—the Lamb, the Lion, the Manchild, the Word of God, the Alpha and Omega, etc. (Besides, arguments from silence do not make the best arguments. Shall we conclude that because God’s name was seemingly absent from the Book of Esther that He was not present in the Book of Esther? Quite to the contrary; God was very much present and active!) And the notion that the “saints” of Revelation, chapters 4–21 are “the Jews,” rather than the many-membered, Jewish-Gentile Body of Christ, defies the revelation of God’s “one new man” (Ephesians 2:15) and undercuts Paul’s understanding of Israel’s re-inclusion into that “one new man” in these last days. (Note carefully Romans 11:17, 23–27, where restored Israel in the last days is not raised up as an entity separate from the Church but rather grafted back into that olive tree which the mainly Gentile Church had been already graciously grafted into by God). Once a serious student of the Scriptures understands the issue of Israel’s restoration to the Body of Christ in these last days, all the seeming arguments for both dispensationalism and the pre-tribulation rapture utterly fall apart.
Paul, in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–8 also clearly taught that the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and the rapture (the gathering, or mustering) of the saints to Jesus cannot take place until the great apostasy has first happened and the man of sin (the Anti-Christ) is first revealed (verse 3). Paul also taught that the Church will get “relief” from persecution and tribulation only “when [and not secretly seven years before] the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels [to] punish those who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel . . .” (2 Thessalonians 1:6–8). [Also, the understanding in this passage, that the one who now holds the Anti-Christ back is the Holy Spirit in the Church, is an unfounded theory. To seek to prove a pre-tribulation rapture on such a supposition is not sound exegesis. Though we are not told exactly who the “restraining one” is (it could be Michael the restraining archangel, as Daniel 10 teaches), but it is most certainly not the Holy Spirit in the Church, for if the Holy Spirit is caught up into heaven in the Church at the onset of the tribulation, who then will be poured out in power over all the earth during the tribulation?]

One of the main concerns among pre-tribulationists is a valid biblical concern—that the Church will not endure the wrath of God in the closing days of time. And indeed it will not, for “God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:9). This salvation from wrath, however, does not come through a pre-tribulation rapture but, according to verse 8 in this very passage, through the saints putting on the armor of God, that they might stand “in the evil day” (see also Ephesians 6:13). Powerful examples are given to us in the Holy Scriptures of how God was thus able to keep His own in the hour of His outpoured wrath. For example, the children of Israel were preserved in the plagues that fell on Egypt. Many of those plagues are identical to the ones that will yet fall in the great tribulation—but God’s ancient people were safely “kept by the power of God” (see Exodus 8:22; 9:4–7; 9:25–26; 10:23; 12:12–13). And God’s promise is as true for us today as it was for them back then: “No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt” (Exodus 12:13). Further examples of God’s keeping power in the midst of great tribulation are Daniel being kept safely in the lion’s den and the three Hebrew sons kept safely in the fiery furnace. Indeed, these promises were valid for them and will be for us—“when you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze” (Isaiah 43:2). Amen!

But Exactly Why Should We Be Here?

The question, “Why should we be here?” has a most powerful answer. First of all, only a pampered, effete western Christianity can afford to believe in an end-time that is tribulation-free. The scores of millions who suffered tribulation, even unto death, under atheist communism did not have that luxury! And should the saints suffer at the hands of godless men in these last days, it will only be out of love for our Lord Jesus that they will endure. But the real reason
for being here—the real reason for our actually wanting to be here—is that these last days are ordained by God to be days of unparalleled outpouring of the Holy Spirit and days of unprecedented apostolic harvest among the nations. And, simply stated, God has promised to take care of us in these days if we will but give ourselves to carry out His purposes of worldwide apostolic evangelism! (And no, He has not relegated this harvest solely to those Jews who are left behind, but rather to His total Jewish-Gentile Bride, the Body of Messiah!) Just note the implications of these promises—“In the last days, God says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people . . . . The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious Day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Acts 2:17–21). What a harvest is implicit in that statement! “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as He promised long ago through His holy prophets” (Acts 3:19–21). Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved . . . .” (Romans 11:25–26). What a harvest! “Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn [early] and spring [latter] rains. You, too, be patient and stand firm because the Lord’s coming is near” (James 5:7–8). And as a result of this glorious outpouring, John could testify: “I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language . . . . These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9, 14). Who would not want to participate in such a glorious happening?

Scripturally, God’s plan for the climax of the ages is clear—an unparalleled end-time outpouring of His Holy Spirit, accompanied by an unprecedented harvest of souls, accompanied by the protection of His own from His falling wrath on the ungodly, and finally Jesus’ Second Coming. And Jesus’ return includes our mustering (our gathering) together to meet the Lord (literally, to “greet the Lord in the air,” 1 Thessalonians 4:17) and then, as His gathered and assembled army, to return with Him to reign over all the earth! (Revelation 19:14) And in that mustering or gathering together [which is the real purpose of the rapture], the unprepared will be “left behind” for judgment, but the prepared people of God will be wedded to our Lord Jesus Christ forever, in the glorious “wedding supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:7, 9, 17). I can think of nothing more wonderful for us to give ourselves to than this great and wide purpose of God in these last days! Amen!


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