

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Premillennialism and the Tribulation

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In the memorable Olivet Discourse, our Lord Jesus Christ answered the searching question of His disciples, “What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?” (Matt 24:3). The major event predicted by the Lord as a sign of the second advent was the great tribulation. He urged those living in Palestine in that day “to flee unto the mountains” (Matt 24:16). He exhorted them, “Let him that is on the housetop not go down to take out the things that are in his house: and let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak. But woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on a sabbath: for then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world unto now, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened” (Matt 24:17–22).

For those anticipating eagerly the coming advent of Christ, these words are fraught with tremendous meaning. Does there lie between us and the consummation of the age this awful period of trial? Must the church remain on earth through the great tribulation?

The Tribulation a Major Problem of Eschatology

While Eschatology is at present enjoying revived interest among liberal theologians, the trend among conservatives seems to be to minimize its importance. It is frequently argued that in a day when the authority of the Bible as a whole is being disputed there is little profit in debating the fine points of Eschatology. If this is the case, an inquiry into the relationship of the tribulation to premillennialism is wasted effort. The question of whether the church must continue on earth through the predicted time of trouble, however, is neither trivial nor academic. It can be demonstrated that the issue is fraught with tremendous practical and doctrinal implications. While not as far-reaching in Biblical interpretation as premillennialism as a whole, the decision concerning the character of the tribulation is important to any detailed program of the future and is significant in its application of principles of interpretation far beyond the doctrine itself.

Importance of the doctrine of the tribulation. There are at least three reasons why the relationship of the tribulation to the coming of the Lord is important. It is first of all an *exegetical* problem. The many passages in the Old and New Testament, including the

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major part of the Book of Revelation, require an intelligent exegesis. The problem of the interpretation of the tribulation cannot be left in the area of suspended judgment without leaving these passages without exposition.

Second, it is a *theological* problem. It can be demonstrated that the interpretation given to the tribulation is integral to particular theological points of view, especially in the area of Eschatology. Questions such as the use of the literal method of interpretation as opposed to the nonliteral or spiritualizing method, the separation of divine programs for Israel and the church, and the larger issue of amillennialism versus premillennialism combine to make the doctrine significant beyond its own borders. To some extent the interpretation of the tribulation is predetermined by decision in other aspects of Eschatology.

Third, the doctrine is one of *practical* importance. If the church is destined to endure the persecutions of the tribulation, it is futile to hold the coming of the Lord before it as an imminent hope. Instead, it should be recognized that Christ cannot come until these predicted sorrows have been accomplished. On the other hand, if Christ will come for His church before the predicted time of trouble, Christians can regard His coming as an imminent, daily expectation. From a practical standpoint, the doctrine has tremendous implications.

Postmillennial attitude toward the tribulation. While there is a wide variety of interpretation of the doctrine of the tribulation, each form of millennial teaching can be broadly characterized by its own position on the tribulation. In the postmillennial point of view, as illustrated in the writings of Charles Hodge, the tribulation is viewed as a final state of trouble just preceding the grand climax of the triumph of the gospel. The national conversion of Israel and the national conversion of Gentiles is viewed as containing in its last stages a final conflict with Antichrist, which is equated with Romanism.¹

It is characteristic of postmillennialism that it does not attempt a literal interpretation of the tribulation. Some less conservative than Hodge, such as Snowden, regard the tribulation as any time of trouble, now largely past or associated with the apostolic period. Hodge himself does not offer any specific system of interpretation, as illustrated in his comment on the Book of Revelation: "Some regard it as a description in oriental imagery of contemporaneous events; others as intended to set forth the different phases of the spiritual life of the Church; others as designed to unfold the leading events in the history of the Church and of the world in their chronological order; others again assume that it is a series, figuratively speaking, of circles; each vision or series of visions relating to the same events under different aspects; the end, and the preparation for the end, being

¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III, 812–36.

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presented over and over again; the great theme being the coming of the Lord, and the triumph of his Church."²

While vague as to specific teaching, the postmillennial interpretation of the tribulation is clear, however, in its general characteristics. The tribulation is a time of trouble just preceding the second advent of Christ. The tribulation, however, is not very definite and its character is not sufficiently serious to interfere with the onward march of the church to a great climax of triumph at the second advent of Christ. The tribulation is a minor phase of the closing events of the age.

Amillennial attitude toward the tribulation. The amillennial interpretation of the tribulation does not differ essentially from the postmillennial although it has a different theological context. In Augustinian amillennialism, the present age is regarded as the predicted millennium, and inasmuch as the tribulation is said to precede the millennium, by so much it must already be past. Often it is identified with the troubles of Israel in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

The fact that the Book of Revelation was written after this event, however, and that a time of trouble is predicted to precede the second advent, has led some like Berkhof to hold to a future tribulation, placing the fulfillment of Scripture dealing with the tribulation, to which is added the battle of Gog and Magog, after the millennium. Berkhof writes: "The words of Jesus [Olivet Discourse] undoubtedly found a partial fulfillment in the days preceding the destruction of Jerusalem, but will evidently have a further fulfillment in the future in a tribulation far surpassing anything that has ever been experienced, Matt 24:21; Mark 13:19."³

The amillennial view, therefore, holds to a future tribulation period, but there is little uniformity concerning its exact character. The tendency in amillennialism is to avoid specific details in describing the tribulation. In effect, while admitting the fact of the coming tribulation amillennarians spiritualize the sequence of events which are prophesied. This is particularly true in the interpretation of the tribulation section of the Book of Revelation.

Premillennial attitude toward the tribulation. In general premillennarians interpret the coming tribulation with more literalness than either the amillennarians or postmillennarians. Within the ranks of premillennarians, however, there are three main types of interpretation. Some premillennarians hold the view that the coming of Christ for His

² *Ibid.*, III, 826.

³ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 700.

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church will be posttribulational, that is, that the church will remain on earth throughout the tribulation period.

In recent years there has arisen a modification of this, known as the midtribulational view, which holds that the church will be translated at a coming of the Lord for His church just before the great tribulation prophesied by our Lord, but in the middle of the seven-year period predicted by Daniel as preceding the coming of Christ (Dan 9:27). This view is rather recent and as yet has a limited literature.

The third view, which is very popular with premillenarians who have specialized in prophetic study, is the pretribulational position, Which holds that Christ will come for His church before the entire seven-year period predicted by Daniel. The church in this point of view does not enter at all into the final tribulation period. This teaching was espoused by Darby and the Plymouth Brethren and popularized by the famous *Scofield Reference Bible*. Generally speaking, the pretribulation position is followed by those who consider premillenarianism a *system* of Bible interpretation, while the posttribulational and midtribulational positions characterize those who limit the area of premillennialism to Eschatology.

An offshoot of pretribulationism, though seldom recognized as an orthodox point of view, is the partial rapture concept that only the godly Christians expecting the return of Christ will be translated before the tribulation, the rest continuing through it until the return of Christ to establish His earthly kingdom. It is obvious that only one of these four possible positions is correct, and it is the duty of the Biblical exegete to determine which is the proper interpretation of related Scriptures. It is the plan of the following treatment to deal with the pretribulation position, including a refutation of the partial rapture concept, then to consider the posttribulational view, and finally the midtribulational position.

Pretribulationism

The pretribulational interpretation regards the coming of the Lord and the translation of the church as preceding immediately the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy of a final seven-year period before the second advent. Based on a literal interpretation of Daniel's prophecy, it is held that there has been no fulfillment of Daniel 9:27 in history, and that therefore it prophesies a future period, familiarly called "the tribulation." The seven years of Daniel, bringing to a close the program of Israel prior to the second advent, will, therefore, be fulfilled between the translation of the church and the second advent of Christ to establish His kingdom on earth. At the translation, before the seven years, Christ will return to meet the church in the air; at the second advent, after the seven years, it is held that Christ will return with His Church from heaven to establish His millennial reign

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on earth. This general teaching is widely held by premillenarians who are in substantial agreement on the main points of the teaching.

This view is opposed, however, by posttribulationists and midtribulationists among premillenarians, and by practically all amillenarians and postmillenarians. The pretribulationist position is limited to conservatives as opposed to liberals and to premillenarians as opposed to other millenarian views. It is largely a teaching within the ranks of premillenarians. In the ensuing discussion, premillennialism will be assumed as the basis for argument, along with a general structure of conservative theology including the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures. First to be considered are the arguments in favor of the pretribulationist position.

The historical argument. One of the commonly repeated reasons for opposing pretribulationism is that it is a new and novel doctrine beginning no earlier than Darby. Reese, who is usually regarded as the outstanding champion of opponents of pretribulationism, states categorically that it is “a series of doctrines that had never been heard of before,”⁴ that is, before the nineteenth century. Reese charges that the followers of Darby “sought to overthrow what, since the Apostolic Age, have been considered by all pre-millennialists as established results.”⁵

It must be conceded that the advanced and detailed theology of pretribulationism is not found in the Fathers, but neither is any other detailed and “established” exposition of premillennialism. The development of most important doctrines took centuries. If the doctrine of the Trinity did not receive permanent statement until the fourth century and thereafter, beginning with the Council of Nicea in 325, and if the doctrine of human depravity was not a settled doctrine of the church until the fifth century and after, and if such doctrines as the sufficiency of Scripture and the priesthood of the believer were not recognized until the Protestant Reformation, it is not to be wondered at that details of Eschatology, always difficult, should unfold slowly. It is certainly an unwarranted generalization to postulate a detailed and systematic premillennialism as in existence from the Apostolic Age.

The central feature of pretribulationism, the doctrine of imminency, is, however, a prominent feature of the doctrine of the early church. Without facing all the problems which the doctrine of imminency raises, such as its relation to the tribulation, the early church lived in constant expectation of the coming of the Lord for His church. According to Moffat, it was the widespread Jewish belief that some would be exempt from the

⁴ Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, p. 19.

⁵ *Loc. cit.*

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tribulation.⁶ Clement of Rome (first century) wrote, “Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scriptures also bear witness, saying, ‘Speedily will he come, and will not tarry;’ and, ‘The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Holy One, for whom ye look.’”⁷

The Didache (120 A.D.) contains the exhortation, “Watch for your life’ sake. Let not your lamps be quenched, nor your loins unloosed; but be ye ready, for ye know not the hour in which our Lord cometh.”⁸ It should be clear from this quotation that the coming of the Lord is considered as possible in any hour, certainly an explicit reference to the imminency of the Lord’s return.

A similar reference is found in the “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles” (Book VII, Sec. ii, xxxi): “Observe all things that are commanded you by the Lord. Be watchful for your life. ‘Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye like unto men who wait for their Lord, when He will come, at even, or in the morning, or at cock-crowing, or at midnight. For what hour they think not, the Lord will come; and if they open to Him, blessed are those servants, because they were found watching....’”⁹ Here again is the doctrine of imminency taught without apology.

It should be clear to any discerning student of prophecy that this expectancy of the early return of the Lord was not always coupled with a systematic structure of Eschatology as a whole. The problems were frequently left unresolved. To say, however, that the doctrine of imminency, which is the heart of pretribulationism, is a new and unheard of doctrine is, to say the least, an overstatement. While the teachings of the Fathers are not clear on details, it is certainly beyond dispute that they regarded the coming of the Lord as a matter of daily expectancy. It is entirely unwarranted to assume as the posttribulationists do that the early church regarded the imminent coming of the Lord as an impossibility and that their expectation was the great tribulation first, then the coming of the Lord. If pretribulationism was unknown, in the same sense modern posttribulationism was also unknown. The charge that pretribulationism is a new and novel doctrine is false; that it has been developed and defined to a large extent in recent centuries is true. In any event, the thesis that the early Fathers were omniscient and once-for-all defined every phase of theology is an unjustified limitation on the liberty of the Spirit of God to reveal the truth of Scripture to each generation of believers. The history

⁶ Cf. *Expositor’s Greek Testament*. s.v., Rev 3:10. “Rabbinic piety (Sanh. 98b) expected exemption from the tribulation of the latter days only for those who were absorbed in good works and in sacred studies.” For this citation and others which follow, cf. H.C. Thiessen, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, April-June, 1935, 187-96.

⁷ *1 Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, chapter 23.

⁸ *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, VII, 382.

⁹ *Ibid.*, VII, 471.

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of the doctrine of the church has always to this hour revealed progress in other areas, and it is to be expected that this will continue also in Eschatology.

The hermeneutical argument. It is generally agreed by all parties that one of the major differences between amillennialism and premillennialism lies in the use of the literal method of interpretation. Amillenarians, while admitting the need for literal interpretation of Scripture in general, have held from Augustine to the present time that prophecy is a special case requiring spiritualizing or nonliteral interpretation. Premillenarians hold, on the contrary, that the literal method applies to prophecy as well as other doctrinal areas, and therefore contend for a literal millennium.

In a somewhat less degree the same hermeneutical difference is seen in the pretribulation versus the posttribulation positions. Pretribulationism is based upon a literal interpretation of key Scriptures, while posttribulationism tends toward spiritualization of the tribulation passages. This is seen principally in two aspects.

Posttribulationists usually ignore the distinction between Israel and the church much in the fashion of the amillenarian school. The reason for this is that none of the tribulation passages in either the Old or New Testament ever mention the “church” or the *ecclesia*. In order to prove that the church is in the tribulation period, it is necessary to identify key terms as equivalent to the church. Hence, Israel becomes a general name for the church and in some contexts becomes an equivalent term. The term *elect* becomes a general designation for the saints of all ages, regardless of limitation of the context. Saints of all dispensations are considered as members of the true church. In order to make these various terms equivalents, it is necessary to take Scripture in other than a literal sense in many instances—the use of Israel as equivalent to the church being an illustration. The proof that the church is in the tribulation requires a theological system which spiritualizes many of its terms, and posttribulationists brush off a more literal interpretation as too trivial to answer.

McPherson, for instance writes in connection with the “elect” of Matthew 24:22, “There is nothing here to indicate who the *elect* are, although there is every likelihood the term refers to the Church, inasmuch as of the fifteen other occurrences of the word *elect* in the New Testament, one refers to Christ, another to certain angels, and there is no sound reason for supposing the other thirteen do not refer to the Church, or individual members of the Church.¹⁰ While admitting that the word *elect* does not always refer to the church, he states flatly that “there is no sound reason for supposing the other thirteen do not refer to the church, or individual members of the church.” Without offering any proof or argument whatever, this important doctrinal point is settled. Thus the term *church* and

¹⁰ Norman S. McPherson, *Triumph Through Tribulation*, 8.

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the *elect* are made equivalent, thereby proving that the church is in the tribulation. This is possible only with a background of Scriptural interpretation which spiritualizes the promises of Israel much in the same fashion as amillenarians do.

A second aspect of spiritualization characteristic of posttribulationism is in its treatment of the tribulation itself. While adherents often recognize a future period of trouble, the tendency is to minimize its severity and avoid any detailed exegesis. This is seen particularly in the exegesis of Revelation 6–19. While pretribulationists generally adopt a futuristic and realistic interpretation carrying with it a high degree of literalism in exegesis, posttribulationists follow any one of several methods of interpretation which avoids a literal and futuristic exegesis. Very popular among posttribulationists is the historical interpretation of Revelation in which its prophecies of the tribulation are relegated to the past trials of the saints. Berkhof, for instance, in his treatment of the tribulation avoids any specific interpretation of the Book of Revelation as a whole.¹¹

Premillenarians who are posttribulationists usually do the same. McPherson writes in this vein, “Why cannot it be consistent with the divine purpose for the Church to go through the Tribulation without being compelled to feel the full force of it, even as the Israelites went through the plague-period in Egypt? ...The way of escape might take the form of a partial exemption from suffering...”¹² Reese has a different slant on the same subject by declaring that “immediately before the Day of the Lord falls, God can call His saints to Himself, without the necessity of an additional advent a generation earlier.”¹³ He goes on to explain, “That is, the righteous shall first be removed and then the judgment shall fall.”¹⁴ In effect, Reese is denying that judgments will fall until the close of the tribulation when the Lord comes. Practically speaking, he denies that the tribulation will be a time of tribulation. For Reese the wrath does not begin at Revelation 6:13 but in Revelation 19. By such sophistry the teaching that the church will go through the tribulation but without tribulation is preserved. Of importance here, however, is the illustration of the principle of interpretation used by the posttribulationists—the avoidance of the literal interpretation of the major passage, the Book of Revelation.

The choice of a weakened tribulation is not an accident, however, but necessary to their position. Only by this device can passages picturing the hope of the Lord’s return as a comfort and joy be sustained. It is impossible to harmonize a literal interpretation of the tribulation with posttribulationism. It would nullify not only the promises of comfort, but also the imminency and practical application of the doctrine of the Lord’s coming.

¹¹ Berkhof, *loc. cit.*

¹² McPherson, *op. cit.*, 22-23.

¹³ Reese, *op. cit.*, 212.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

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The controversy between pretribulationists and posttribulationists is, in miniature, a replica of the larger controversy of premillennialism and amillennialism as far as principles of interpretation are concerned. This is brought out more in detail in the Scriptural revelation of the tribulation itself to which we now turn.¹⁵

Pretribulationism (Continued)

Argument from the nature of the tribulation. Just as premillennialism is founded upon a literal interpretation of millennial passages, so pretribulationism is based upon a literal interpretation of the tribulation passages. A careful and literal exegesis of the Scriptures dealing with the tribulation reveal no evidence whatever that the church of the redeemed of the present age will go through the tribulation. This is brought out particularly in the Scriptural revelation of the nature of the tribulation.

Before ascertaining whether the church will pass through the tribulation, it is of utmost importance to understand first what the Scriptures teach about this coming period. Practically all types of posttribulationism are built upon confusion of tribulation in general, which characterizes various ages, and the great tribulation, which is the predicted future time. For instance, George H. Fromow answers the question of whether the church will pass through the great tribulation by countering: "The Church is *already* passing through 'the Great Tribulation,' according to the sense of Rev vii, vv. 13, 14 ... Rev vii . is the only passage where we find the Tribulation called 'great.' Its use as embracing the whole of the Church's course, corresponds with the entire record of the Scriptural history of the redeemed. 'Great' thus covers the entire period of the history of the redeemed people of God, of 'Saints,' or 'Gracious Ones,' or 'Church,' however they may be described."¹⁶ This quotation is notable because it illustrates two leading characteristics of posttribulationism which are essential to their conclusions: (1) confusion of the great tribulation with tribulation in general; (2) confusion of the church with saints as a whole. While posttribulationists sometimes avoid the first, they seldom avoid the second. As a study of the tribulation will bring out, "...not one syllable of Scripture affirms that the church goes through the great tribulation, or even enters that awful period."¹⁷

The Old Testament reveals that the tribulation deals with (1) the nation Israel; (2) the pagan Gentile political powers; (3) saints who are described as either Israelites or

¹⁵ *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 1998 (electronic edition). Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 111:443, July-September 1954, 193-203.

¹⁶ George H. Fromow, *Will the Church Pass through the Tribulation?*, 2-3.

¹⁷ C.I. Scofield, *Will the Church Pass through the Great Tribulation?*, 10.

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Gentiles. It is certain that the true church cannot be equated with the Gentile political powers, though the apostate church of the tribulation period is under the control of the political ruler of that time. Only by spiritualization, characteristic of amillennialism, can the nation Israel be considered the same as the church. The Old Testament revelation which specifies the judgment of Israel and the Gentile powers as the objective of the tribulation period by so much declares that the tribulation does not concern itself with the church, the body of believers in this present age. The fact that saints are mentioned proves only that there will arise in that period some who believe and are saved. A survey of tribulation passages will demonstrate these facts.

One of the first references to the tribulation is found in Deuteronomy 4:29–30: “But from thence ye shall seek Jehovah thy God, and thou shalt find him, when thou searchest after him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, in the latter days thou shalt return to Jehovah thy God, and hearken unto his voice.” The tribulation here is revealed as preparatory for the restoration of the nation Israel, and therefore the preparation of Israel for the coming kingdom is an outstanding aspect of the period.

Another important Old Testament reference dealing with the tribulation is found in Jeremiah 30:4–11. In this passage the tribulation is declared to be “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (v. 7) and as unprecedented in its severity (cf. Matt 24:21). The revelation continues, however, with the glad announcement, “he shall be saved out of it” (v. 7). The Gentiles are described as being judged and Israel is delivered from her oppressors. Jehovah is to be the God of Jacob and David is to be raised up to be their king (v. 9). Israel will be regathered from near and far and shall return to the land (v. 10). The destiny of Israel and the nations is contrasted in these words: “For I am with thee, saith Jehovah, to save thee: for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have scattered thee, but I will not make a full end of thee; but I will correct thee in measure, and will in no wise leave thee unpunished” (v. 11). Again in this passage, both Jews and Gentiles are declared to be the objects of divine dealings in the tribulation, but the church, composed of true believers, is not in view at all.

Daniel supplies much material on the tribulation which falls into the same pattern. The seventieth “week” of Daniel,¹⁸ the latter part of which is the time of great tribulation, describes the coming of the “one that maketh desolate” — the evil world-ruler of the great tribulation (Dan 9:27). The period is concerned with “thy people” (Dan 9:24) which can be no other than the Jewish people in this context. In Daniel 12:1, “a time of trouble” for “the children of thy people” is described. Like Jeremiah 30:7, this period is declared to be

¹⁸ For a good discussion of the future character of the seventieth week, see Robert D. Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days*, 135-60.

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“such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time” (Dan 12:1). It is declared to culminate in deliverance: “and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book” (Dan 12:1). The reference to “thy people” is clearly a reference to the Jewish nation which shall be delivered at the end of the tribulation period.

None of the Old Testament passages nor any of the multiplied references in the Minor Prophets includes the church of the present age in its foreview of the tribulation. It is universally presented as dealing with the nation Israel and with the Gentile nations. Only by unwarranted identification of the church with Israel and by ignoring the context can the church be drawn into the picture.

What is true of passages in the Old Testament dealing with the tribulation is also true of the New Testament. Posttribulationists tend to slide over the obvious fact that the church is never once mentioned in the New Testament as being in the tribulation period. A notable passage is Matthew 24:15–31, the context of which is definitely Jewish. The sign given is the abomination of desolation connected with desecration of the Jewish temple of that time. Instructions are given to those in Judea to flee to the mountains—another indication that Israelites are in view. Reference is made to the Sabbath, a Jewish institution (Matt 24:20) and they are told to pray that their flight be not on the Sabbath—a day in which their flight would be very obvious.

Posttribulationists, while conceding that there is no reference to the church as such, seize upon the word “elect” found in Matthew 24:22, 31. Pretribulationists concede and uniformly teach that there will be elect, that is, saved people in the tribulation time. This fact does not in the slightest prove that these mentioned in this way belong to the church, the body of Christ. All saved people of all ages as individuals are elect. Israel is also an elect nation, that is, specially chosen to fulfill divine purposes. The question is not whether there are any elect in the tribulation, but whether that portion of the elect which is called the church, the body of Christ, is ever found. As far as this passage is concerned, there is no evidence whatever for the presence of the church in this period.

Special attention is often given the reference in Matthew 24:31 which states: “And he shall send forth 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.” This has been taken by posttribulationists to prove *ipso facto* that the translation of the church takes place after the tribulation. McPherson, cited previously, states dogmatically: “There is nothing here to indicate who the *elect* are, although there is every likelihood the term refers to the Church...”.¹⁹ Reese calls it “supreme rubbish” to question whether the *elect* as used here

¹⁹ McPherson, *op. cit.*, 8.

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is equivalent to the church. He cites the fact that our Lord used the same expression, *elect* or *chosen*, in His parable of the wedding of the king's son.²⁰ It does not seem comprehensible to Reese that saints in the church and saints who are Israelites or Gentiles before the church can both be elect and still not the same company. Arguing that *elect* must be an all-inclusive term is a begging of the question.

In the first place, the context points to the limitation of the word *elect* to living saints on the earth at the time of the second advent (*cf.* Matt 24:22). Others have regarded the word "elect" in Matthew 24:31 as a reference to Israel as an elect nation. In either case, the passage would teach nothing whatever against the pretribulation position and would not include the church.

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. At the second advent, indeed, there is a gathering together of the church from heaven and the Old Testament saints in resurrection along with the elect angels as well as elect in the earth. All elect of all ages converge upon the millennial scene. While Matthew states the elect are gathered "from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt 24:31), Mark includes "from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven" (Mark 13:27). The point is that pretribulationism is not hindered in the slightest by the form of expression that is used here, and posttribulationists are guilty of begging the question by assuming that this passage confirms their position. 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 claim that it does not offer any evidence whatever against it.

The argument of Reese that the gathering of the elect is positive proof that the translation of the saints takes place at this time is another instance of reading into the passage what it does not say. Reese states: "The assertion of Kelly's in his *Second Coming* (p. 211) that there is no rapture at Matt. xxiv.31, is as bold as it is unfounded. Our Lord in that passage gave a perfect picture of the assembling of the saved of this Dispensation by means of a rapture; St. Mark even used for 'gather' the verbal form of the same word used for 'gathering' in 2 Thess. ii.1, where Paul refers to the Rapture. To unbiased minds the gathering of the saved, or the Elect, in Matt. xxiv.31, is the prototype of Paul's teaching in 1 Thess. iv.16–17, and 2 Thess. ii.1."²¹ The logical fallacy of this statement should be apparent. Reese argues because there is a gathering at the translation that therefore every mention of a gathering must be the same event. The truth is that there will be a gathering

²⁰ Reese, *op. cit.*, 207.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 208.

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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 righteous dead. Matthew 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.

The major Scriptural passage on the tribulation period is the Book of Revelation, chapters 4–19. Here in fifteen chapters in the most graphic language possible the great catastrophic time of trouble is unfolded. Any reasonably literal interpretation of this portion of 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 which will culminate in the “revelation of Jesus Christ,” the second advent proper. It should be borne in mind that the Book of Revelation deals with the revelation of Jesus Christ to an unbelieving world as its God and Judge. The description of the tribulation time is the fitting frame to the picture, giving the events preceding the climactic day of the Lord.

It is notable that in this extended portion of Scripture there is not one mention of the church, the body of Christ. After the message to the seven churches in Asia, obviously contemporary to the first century, not one reference is found to the church or any other title peculiar to believers of this present age. To be sure, saints are mentioned both in heaven and on earth, but this general reference is not a hindrance to the pretribulation position. The church is also in view in the figure of marriage in Revelation 19 picturing the coming of the wife of the Lamb, but this is in connection with the second advent and does not constitute any problem. Like passages previously considered, the Book of Revelation presents the tribulation as having the divine purpose of purging the nation Israel and bringing them to repentance and of judging and destroying the Gentile political power of that day. The entire program as revealed in the Book of Revelation is without relevance to the present purpose of God of forming a body of believers from Jews and Gentiles to constitute the bride of Christ.

It is, of course, conceded that there are many passages which teach that even the church will have a measure of tribulation while on earth. Christ told His disciples plainly, “In the world ye shall have tribulation” (John 16:33). Paul preached “that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22; cf. 2 Tim 3:12). This is taken as proving beyond question that the church will go through the future tribulation by some posttribulationists.²² It illustrates the illogical thinking which confuses Scriptural

²² George L. Rose, *Tribulation Till Translation*, 76-77.

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teaching on tribulation in general which abides through the age with the future distinctive period of tribulation declared to be unprecedented. The same passage cannot refer to both. The great tribulation is always presented in Scripture as a future time of trouble while the state of difficulty and persecution experienced by the early church was clearly contemporary. Posttribulationism has not proved anything until it has proved that the church, the body of Christ, will be in that prophesied period of unprecedented trouble. This is, however, impossible, as none of the passages which deal with this tribulation period mention the church.

Not only is there no mention of the church in any passage describing the future tribulation, but there are specific promises given to the church that deliverance from that period is assured. According to 1 Thessalonians 5:9, Christians are promised, “For God appointed us not unto wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The wrath of God will be poured out upon the world during the great tribulation. Revelation 6:17 states, “For the great day of their wrath is come; and who is able to stand?” The character of the judgments which will fall is such that they will affect everyone—famine, pestilence, sword, earthquake, stars falling from heaven. The only way one could be kept from that day of wrath would be to be delivered beforehand. The same context in 1 Thessalonians 5 also affirms that the believer will not be overtaken by the day of destruction like a thief in the night and that the believer is not to be included with the children of darkness who are doomed for destruction. Instead of being appointed to wrath and sudden destruction as children of darkness, believers are declared to be appointed to salvation and to living together with Him.

1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 speaks in similar vein. Jesus is declared to be the one “who delivered us from the wrath to come.” The possibility of escaping the coming day of trial is predicted in Luke 21:36: “But watch ye at every season, making supplication, that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”

The church at Philadelphia is promised: “Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth” (Rev 3:10). As the translators have made clear, the thought of the Greek is to “keep from,” not to “keep in.” The promise was to be kept from “the hour” of trial, not just the trials in the hour. The primary promise to the church of Philadelphia was that they would not enter this hour of trial. Historically, it meant just that. The church at Philadelphia was not to enter the tribulation period. By application, if expositors are correct who find in the seven churches a foreshadowing of the entire church age, then the Philadelphia church, representing the true and faithful church, is promised deliverance before the hour comes. While it may be debatable to what

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extent this constitutes absolute proof for pretribulationism, it gives no comfort whatever to posttribulationism.²³

The Scriptures repeatedly indicate that Christians of this age are kept from wrath. Romans 5:9 states: “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through him.” This principle is illustrated in Scripture in such historic cases as the deliverance of Lot from Sodom, which is taken as a specific illustration of deliverance from wrath in 2 Peter 2:6–9. Noah and his family, delivered from the flood by the ark, constitute another illustration of the principle. Rahab at Jericho was also delivered from the doomed city. While illustrations cannot properly be taken as absolute proof, they support the idea that God characteristically delivers believers from wrath designed for judgment upon the unbelievers. If God delivers the church before the time of tribulation, it will be in keeping with the general principle.

The nature of the tribulation as revealed in Scripture constitutes, therefore, an important argument supporting the teaching that the church will not go through the tribulation. It has been shown that a literal interpretation of the tribulation does not produce any evidence that the church will be in this period. Important passages such as Deuteronomy 4:29–30; Jeremiah 30:4–11; Daniel 9:24–27; 12:1; Matthew 24:15–31; Revelation 4–19; 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10; 5:4–9 do not indicate that the church will be in the tribulation period. It has been shown that the purpose of the tribulation is to purge and judge Israel and to punish and destroy Gentile power. In neither aspect is the church the object of the events of the period. In addition to these general arguments, the Scriptures also indicate that the believer in this present age will be kept from the time of wrath (1 Thess 1:9–10; 5:4–10; 2 Pet 2:6–9; Rev 3:10). Taken as a whole, the study of the tribulation as revealed in Scripture does not afford any support to a posttribulation translation of the saints.

Argument from the nature of the church versus the nature of Israel. Much of the background for the differing points of view on pretribulationism as opposed to posttribulationism is found in different concepts of the church. While it is difficult to make an accurate generalization, usually those who sharply distinguish Israel and the church are both premillennial and pretribulationist, while those who consider Israel and the church more or less the same concept, even if premillennial, tend to be posttribulationist. The concept of the church as a distinct entity, peculiar to the present age since the Day of Pentecost, usually goes along with the idea that the church will be translated before the tribulation.

If the point of view is accepted that the church of the present age is distinctive, as argued in earlier discussion, it supports the idea that the church will not go through the tribulation. This is seen, first, in the nature of the professing church as compared to the

²³ For further discussion, cf. E. Schuyler English, *Re-Thinking the Rapture*, 85-91.

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nation of Israel. According to pretribulationism, at the time of the translation of the church all true believers are translated from earth to heaven, leaving only that portion of the professing church which was not genuinely saved. These professing but unsaved members of the organized church in the world continue on earth through the tribulation and form the nucleus of the ungodly, apostate church of the tribulation which becomes the state of religion of that time. In this sense only, the church goes through the tribulation. In like manner, the nation Israel enters the tribulation in an unsaved condition and proceeds through the purging experiences which culminate in the second advent and the separation of those in Israel who turn to Christ in that period from those who worship the Antichrist.

All points of view accept the conclusion that both Israel and the professing church go through the tribulation. The many Old Testament passages on the tribulation as well as the New Testament revelation make this clear and beyond dispute. Pretribulationism finds in these facts supporting evidence that the true church, the body of Christ, does not enter the tribulation by the very fact that the same Scriptures which frequently mention Israel and apostate Christendom never mention the true church as being in this period.

This is borne out by the contrast between the body of Christ and the professing church, both of which have a considerable body of Scripture describing their respective programs. The distinction between them, in a word, is the difference between mere profession and reality, between outward conformity and vital regeneration. The professing church moves on to its complete state of apostasy and ends in awful judgment. The true church is caught up to heaven to be the bride of the Son of God. The presence of the apostate church in the tribulation is one of its principal characteristics. The presence of the true church is wholly unnecessary. The distinctions between the true church and the professing church justify the widest difference in program and destiny.

Likewise, there is a graphic difference between the true church and true or spiritual Israel. In the present age, all who are Israelites by natural birth upon receiving Christ as Savior become members of the church, the body of Christ. By so much they are cut off from the particular promises and program of Israel and instead partake of the new program of God for the church on the same basis as Gentile believers. In other words, all who are true or spiritual Israel in the present age by this very fact are members of the church. Immediately after the translation of the church, however, Israelites who turn to God and trust in Christ have the privilege of being saved as individuals even in the tribulation period. When saved in this period Israelites lose none of their national promises. Their hope is the second advent of Christ, the coming of Christ as King and Messiah. While saved on the same basis of the death of Christ as saints in the present age, their program for the future is entirely different. Those who are martyred will be raised at the second

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advent (Rev 20:4–6). Those who survive the persecutions of this period will enter the millennium and become the objects of divine favor and blessing according to the kingdom promises. The contrasts herein provided in the prophetic Word serve to distinguish the future of spiritual Israel in the present age from spiritual Israel in the tribulation. The distinctions are built upon the differences between the church in the present age from saints of all preceding or succeeding periods.

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In a word, prior to Pentecost there was no church, though there were saints among both Jews and Gentiles, who, while retaining their national characteristics, were nevertheless true saints of God. After Pentecost and until the translation there is no body of believers among either Gentiles or Israel except as found in the true church. After the translation of the church, there are no true believers in the professing and apostate church, but believers in that tribulation period retain their national characteristics as saved Gentiles or saved Jews. Never are tribulation saints given the special and peculiar promises given to the church in the present age. The nature of the church in contrast to Israel therefore becomes an argument supporting the pretribulation viewpoint. While these arguments have only relative strength, when added to preceding arguments and supported by those to follow they constitute confirming evidence.²⁴

Pretribulationism (continued)

Argument from imminency of the return of Christ. One of the precious promises left as a heritage to His disciples was the announcement of Christ in the Upper Room, “I come again.” The literalness of this passage, though often assailed, is obvious. Christ said: “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3). Just as literally as Christ went to heaven, so He will come again to receive His disciples to Himself and to take them to the Father’s house.

It is rather strange that the literal interpretation of this passage should be even questioned. It is perfectly obvious that that Christ’s departure from earth to heaven represented in the expression, “if I go,” was a literal departure. He went bodily from earth to heaven. By the same token, “I come again” should be taken as a literal and bodily return. While the present tense is used in the expression, “I come again,” its meaning is an emphatic future. The Authorized Version accordingly translates it, “I will come

²⁴ *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 1998 (electronic edition). Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 111:444, October-December 1954, 289-301.

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again.” A.T. Robertson describes it, “Futuristic present middle, definite promise of the second coming of Christ.”²⁵ As in English, a present tense is sometimes used in the Greek of a certain future event pictured as if already coming to pass. A similar instance is the word of Christ to Mary in John 20:17, “I ascend unto my, Father and your Father, and my God and your God.” The present is used for an emphatic future action.

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 statements 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.

The idea of going to the Father’s house in heaven was quite foreign to the thinking of the disciples. Their hope was that Christ would immediately establish His kingdom on earth and that they would remain in the earthly sphere to reign with Him. The thought of going to heaven first was a new revelation, and one that apparently was not comprehended. In Acts 1:6 they were still asking about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. In making the pronouncement in John 14, Christ is holding before His disciples an entirely different hope than that which was promised to Israel as a nation. It is the hope of the church in contrast to the hope of the Jewish nation. The hope of the church is to be taken to heaven; the hope of Israel is Christ returning to reign over the earth.

The passage so clearly teaches that the disciples will go from earth to heaven that those who deny the pretribulation translation of the church are forced to spiritualize this passage and make the expression “I come again” a coming of Christ for each Christian at the time of his death. Marcus Dods states, “The promise is fulfilled in the death of the Christian, and it has changed the aspect of death.”²⁶ It is certainly desperate exegesis to dream up not only a spiritualization of the term, “I come again,” but to postulate a personal coming of Christ at the death of each saint, a teaching which is never found

²⁵ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, V, 249.

²⁶ Marcus Dods, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, I, 822.

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explicitly in the Scriptures. Dods himself admits this is strange doctrine when he adds weakly, “The personal second coming of Christ is not a frequent theme in this Gospel.”²⁷

The point is that a coming of Christ to individuals at death is not found in John’s Gospel at all, nor in any other Scripture. Here again is an illustration of the fact that spiritualization of Scripture goes hand in hand with denial of the pretribulation rapture. Certainly, the hope set before the disciples cannot be reduced to the formula, “When you die you will go to heaven.” This would not have been new truth. Rather, Christ is promising that when He comes He would take them to heaven where they would be forever with Him, without reference to death.

The ultimate objective of the return of Christ is that the disciples may be with Christ forever, “that where I am, there ye may be also.” It is true that saints who die are immediately taken to heaven as far as their immaterial nature is concerned. In Scripture, however, the hope of being with Christ is connected with the translation of the church as if the intermediate state is not a full realization of what it means to be with Christ. Hence in 1 Thessalonians both the living and the resurrected dead shall “be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:17–18). It is true, however, that the intermediate state is described as being “with Christ,” (Phil 1:23), and as being “at home with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8). Nevertheless, the full expression of fellowship with Christ and being with Him wherever He goes is conditioned on the resurrection of the body for the dead in Christ and the translation of the living saints.

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. On this basis, the disciples are exhorted not to be troubled. If the teaching of Christ had been to the intent that His coming for them was after the great tribulation, it is difficult to see how this message would have been a source of solace to their troubled hearts. Contrast the message of Christ to those living in the tribulation to flee their persecutors (Matt 24:15–22).

Other exhortations in relation to the return of Christ for the church also lose much of their meaning if the doctrine of imminency is destroyed. It should be obvious that only flagrant spiritualization of the tribulation passages which predict the program of events during the tribulation period can possibly save the doctrine of imminency for the posttribulationist. If there are definite events of horrible suffering and persecution yet

²⁷ *Loc. cit.*

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ahead before the return of Christ to establish His kingdom, in no sense can this coming be declared imminent. When Calvin anticipated the imminent coming of Christ, it was on the ground that the tribulation was already largely past—a deduction which depended upon spiritualization of the tribulation passages. Most posttribulationists today oppose the doctrine of imminency and regard the coming of Christ as approaching, but not immediate. For the most part, Scriptural evidence for imminency today is equivalent to proof of the pretribulation viewpoint.

In addition to the exhortation, “Let not your heart be troubled,” there is coupled with the doctrine of the coming of the Lord in John 14:1 the charge, “Wherefore comfort one another 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 no doubt were already 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, even Jesus, who delivered us from the wrath to come.” 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. At the end of chapter 2 and chapter 3, there are renewed assurances of the hope of Christ’s return.

Most of the immediate significance of this hope would be lost if, as a matter of fact, the coming of Christ was impossible until they had passed through the tribulation period. In 1 Thessalonians 5:6, they are exhorted to “watch and be sober,” hardly a realistic command if the coming of Christ was greatly removed from their expectation. In 1 Corinthians 1:7, Paul speaks of the Corinthians as “waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,” which is another mention of the coming of the Lord when He will be revealed in His glory to the church. In Titus 2:13, our future hope is described as “looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” While the appearing of the glory of Christ to the world and to Israel will not be fulfilled until the second coming to establish the kingdom on earth, the church will see the glory of Christ when she meets Him in the air. This is the express teaching of 1 John 3:2: “but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (AV) Again, it is difficult to make realistic a command to “look” for the glory of Christ if, as a matter of fact, the event is separated from us by great trials and persecutions which in all probability would cause our destruction.

The passage in 1 John 3:1–3 adds the exhortation: “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:3, AV). The hope of seeing Christ as He is and being like Him is a purifying hope. Again, the hope is realistic in proportion to

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its imminency. Housewives engage in special efforts of preparation when guests are expected momentarily, while the tendency would be unconcern if visitors were far removed. The teaching of the coming of the Lord for the church is always presented as an imminent event which should occupy the Christian's thought and life to a large extent.

By contrast, the exhortation to those living in the tribulation is to look for signs first and then, after the signs, to look for the return of Christ to establish His kingdom. Accordingly, in the Olivet Discourse, describing the tribulation, they are exhorted to look for the sign of the abomination of desolation (Matt 24:15), and to anticipate the announcement of false Christs. Then, the exhortation to them is to "watch," that is, after the signs have all appeared (Matt 24:42; 25:13). Watching for the return of the Lord to establish the kingdom is related to the preceding signs, while the exhortation to the church is without this context, and the coming of the Lord is regarded as an imminent event. The only concept which does justice to this attitude of expectation of the church is that of the imminent return of Christ. For all practical purposes, abandonment of the pretribulational return of Christ is tantamount to abandonment of the hope of His imminent return. If the Scriptures present the coming of the Lord for His church as imminent, by so much they also declare it as occurring before the predicted period of tribulation.

Argument from the nature of the work of the Holy Spirit in this age. In the Upper Room Discourse, our Lord predicted, among other important prophecies, the coming of the Holy Spirit. While the Holy Spirit had been immanent in the world and active in creation, providence, inspiration, and salvation, a new order of the Spirit was foretold. This truth is gathered up in the momentous declaration recorded in John 14:16–17: "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth: whom the world cannot receive; for it beholdeth him not, neither knoweth him: ye know him; for he abideth with you, and shall be in you." In the distinction made in the last phrase, "abideth with you, and shall be in you," there is predicted the tremendous change to be effected at Pentecost. While formerly the Spirit was "with you," thereafter He would be "in you." The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit was to be one of the outstanding dispensational changes effected at Pentecost. While formerly the Spirit was with the saints and only in extraordinary cases indwelt them, now His indwelling all believers was to mark the wider extent of grace in the new age. The present age is the dispensation of the Spirit.

Just as Christ was omnipresent in the Old Testament, incarnate and present in the world in the Gospels, and returned to heaven in the Acts, so the Holy Spirit, after His period of ministry on the earth in the present age, will return to heaven. The chief proof text concerning the return of the Holy Spirit to heaven is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:6–8, in

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connection with the revelation of the coming lawless one, described as “the man of sin,” and “the son of perdition.” This character is usually identified with the coming Antichrist or world-ruler of the tribulation period. The passage of Scripture dealing with this subject states that the man of sin cannot be revealed until the restrainer is “taken out of the way.” But who is the restrainer?

Expositors of all classes have had a field day in attempting to identify this restrainer. Ellicott cites Schott as suggesting Paul himself.²⁸ As another suggestion, Ellicott refers to Wieseler who identifies it as a collection of the saints at Jerusalem.²⁹ Still more “plausible,” according to Ellicott, is that it refers to “the successor of Roman emperors,” which he traces to Wordsworth.³⁰ His final suggestion, which he thinks is best, is that it is merely a “personification” of “what was previously expressed by the abstract to katechon.”³¹

Thiessen notes that a popular view is one which identifies the restrainer with the Roman Empire.³² Thiessen states, “Denney, Findlay, Alford, Moffatt, hold that this refers to law and order, especially embodied in the Roman Empire.”³³ Another suggestion given by Thiessen, but discarded, is that of Mrs. George C. Needham who identifies the restrainer as Satan himself.³⁴

All of these suggestions break down upon careful examination, however. If students of prophecy are correct that a revival of the ancient Roman Empire is predicted for the coming tribulation period, it should be clear that the Roman Empire could hardly be conceived of as being taken away as a prelude to the establishment of its supreme head as the man of sin. Instead of the Roman Empire or law and order in general being taken away during the tribulation period, it is revealed as an era of absolute government in which everything social, religious, and economic is regimented. If restraint of sin is taken away, it must be traced to a divine removal and the release of satanic evil. Certainly Satan himself does not restrain evil though he may disguise its manifestation. The great tribulation has this characteristic in part because Satan is cast from heaven to earth and is more active than ever because he knows his time is short (Rev 12:9). The power and

²⁸ Charles C. Ellicott, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians with a Revised Translation*, 122.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-23.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

³¹ *Loc. cit.*

³² Henry C. Thiessen, “Will the Church Pass Through the Tribulation?” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 92:301, July-September, 1935.

³³ *Loc. cit.*; Denney, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 325; Findlay, *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, on 2 Thess. 2:7; Alford, *Prolegomena to Thessalonians in Greek Testament*, 68f.; Moffatt, *Expositor's Greek Testament, Introduction to Thessalonians*, 15.

³⁴ *Loc. cit.*, Mrs. George C. Needham, *The Antichrist*, 91.

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success of the Antichrist, or man of sin himself, is traced to satanic power (Rev 13:4). Governmental agency as well as satanic power is insufficient to account for a significant removal of restraint of sin.

The exegesis of the key words of the passage, while in themselves indecisive, is easily harmonized with the concept that the restraining power is that of the Holy Spirit Himself. One of the principal difficulties which have puzzled expositors is the change in gender from the neuter in verse 6, "that which restraineth," to the masculine in verse 7, "one that restraineth." This is, however, easily explained. It may be the difference between the power of God in general as a restraining force in contrast with the person of the restrainer. Another possible explanation is that the change in gender is a recognition of the fact that *pneuma*, the word *spirit* in Greek, is grammatically neuter but is sometimes regarded as a masculine in recognition of the fact that it refers to the person of the Holy Spirit. Hence in John 15:26 and 16:13–14 the masculine is deliberately used in reference to the Spirit. In Ephesians 1:13–14 the relative pronouns are used in the masculine.

The ultimate decision on the reference to the restrainer goes back to the larger question of who after all is capable of restraining sin to such an extent that the man of sin cannot be revealed until the restraint is removed. The doctrine of divine providence, the evidence of Scripture that the Spirit characteristically restrains and strives against sin (Gen 6:3), and the teaching of Scripture that the Spirit is resident in the world and indwelling the church in a special sense in this age combine to point to the Spirit of God as the only adequate answer to the problem of identification of the restrainer. The failure to identify the restrainer as the Holy Spirit is another indication of the inadequate understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in general and His work in relation to the larger providential movements of God in human history.

If the Spirit be identified as the restrainer, a chronology is set up which unmistakably places the translation of the church before the tribulation. The passage teaches that the order of events is as follows: (1) the restrainer is now engaged in restraining sin; (2) the restrainer, will be taken away at a future point of time; (3) then the man of sin can be revealed. Inasmuch as the man of sin is identified with the world ruler, the "prince that shall come" of Daniel 9:26, it should be clear to students of prophecy that the restrainer must be taken away before the beginning of the last seven years of Daniel's prophecy.

The very fact that the covenant will be made with the head of the revived Roman Empire will be an unmistakable token. A covenant involving the regathering of Israel to the land of Palestine and their protection from their foes could not be a secret covenant. Its very nature is a public matter requiring public declaration. A believer in Scripture would be able to identify the man of sin at once when this covenant is made. The chronology,

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therefore, requires the removal of the restrainer before the manifestation of the man of sin by the very act of forming the covenant with Israel.

It should also be evident that, if the Spirit of God characteristically indwells the church as well as the individual saint in this age, the removal of the Spirit would involve a dispensational change and the removal of the church as well. While the Spirit will work in the tribulation period, He will follow the pattern of the period before Pentecost rather than this present age of grace. The Spirit of God will return to heaven after accomplishing His earthly work much as the Lord Jesus Christ returned to heaven after completing His earthly work. In both cases, the work of the Second Person and the Third Person continues, but in a different setting and in a different way.

If, therefore, the restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2 be identified as the Holy Spirit, another evidence is produced to indicate the translation of the church before the final tribulation period will begin on earth. While in the realm of debatable conclusions if left unsupported by other Scriptural evidence, it constitutes a confirmation of the teaching that the church will be translated before the tribulation.³⁵

Pretribulationism (continued)

Argument from the necessity of an interval between the translation and the establishment of the millennial kingdom. A careful study of related Scripture will demonstrate that an interval of time between the translation of the church and the coming of Christ to establish the millennial kingdom is absolutely necessary because certain events must take place in the intervening period. In general, the argument depends upon four lines of evidence: (1) intervening events in heaven; (2) intervening events on earth; (3) the nature of the judgment of the Gentiles; (4) the nature of the judgment of Israel.

(1) Intervening events in heaven. According to 2 Corinthians 5:10, all Christians will appear before a judgment seat of Christ to be judged according to their works: "For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad."³⁶ This judgment is not a general judgment—it relates to those described as "we all," which

³⁵*Bibliotheca Sacra* . 1998 (electronic edition). Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 112:445, January-March 1955, 1-10.

³⁶ All quotations from Scripture are from the American Standard Version (1901) unless otherwise stated.

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the context would seem to limit to believers in Christ in the present age.³⁷ The character of the judgment is that of reward. By comparing this Scripture with a companion passage in 1 Corinthians 3:14–15, it is clear that the issue is not punishment for sin but reward for good works: “If any man’s work shall abide which he hath built thereon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire.” The distinguishing of good and bad works in 2 Corinthians 5 is for the purpose of determining reward.

The character of this judgment seems to set it apart from judgments occurring at the second advent. The rewards anticipated in this judgment are described as imminent in several Scriptures. In 1 Peter 5:4 it is revealed, “And when the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, ye shall receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away.” Again in Revelation 22:12, Christ declares, “Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me to render to each man according as his work is.”

While the time of the judgment is not explicit in any of the passages, certain other evidences seem to require this judgment as preceding and prerequisite to the second coming itself. If the four and twenty elders of Revelation 4:4 are interpreted as referring to the church—a disputed point—it would tend to confirm that judgment of the church has already taken place, as they are already crowned.³⁸ A decisive evidence is found in Revelation 19:6–8 where the “wife” of the Lamb is declared to be arrayed “in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints” (Rev 19:8). The implication is evident that those who compose the “wife” are already translated or resurrected, and their righteous acts determined and rewarded. The marriage supper announced indicates that the marriage itself has already taken place. If the church is to be judged, rewarded, and joined to Christ in the symbol of marriage before the second advent, an interval of time is required.

³⁷ Cf. L.S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, IV, 404–6; E.S. English, *Re-thinking the Rapture*, 81-84.

³⁸ According to the Authorized Version of Revelation 5:9–10, the twenty-four elders are described as redeemed by the blood of Christ and made kings and priests. This would unmistakably identify them as saints and in all probability the church in particular. In the text adopted for translation in the American Standard Version and the Revised Standard Version, the “us” of verse 9 is removed, and the “us” of verse 10 is made “them.” This would make it possible to identify the elders as angels rather than men. Scholars are divided on the issue. Kelly declares the elders are the church. “They are clearly saints and at home in glory,” a conclusion which he states “few will deny” (*Lectures on the Book of Revelation*, 98). James Moffatt in the *Expositor’s Greek Testament* (V:378) identifies the elders as angels and appeals to mythology for support. The interpretation ultimately rests on exegesis as the improved text leaves the question open. Many considerations would point to identification with the church. For further discussion cf. E. Schuyler English, *Re-thinking the Rapture*, 92-98.

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(2) Intervening events on earth. If the premillennial interpretation of Scripture be assumed, it is evident that the tribulation period is a time of preparation for the millennium. Certain problems immediately arise if the church is not translated until the end of the tribulation. Nothing is more evident in the passage dealing with the translation of the church than the fact that *every* believer on that occasion is translated, that is, transformed from a body of flesh to an immortal body and caught up from the earth. The very act of translation also constitutes an absolute separation of all believers from all unbelievers. In a moment of time the greatest separation that could possibly be imagined takes place.

If the translation takes place *after* the tribulation, the question facing the posttribulationists is a very obvious one: Who is going to populate the earth during the millennium? The Scriptures are specific that, during the millennium, saints will build houses and bear children and have normal, mortal lives on earth. If all believers are translated and all unbelievers are put to death, there will be no one left to populate the earth and fulfill these Scriptures. While posttribulationism may satisfy the amillenarian who denies a future millennium, it presents a difficult problem to the premillenarian.

The Scriptures declare emphatically that life on earth in the millennium relates to a people not translated and not resurrected, a people still in the mortal bodies. Isaiah 65:20–25 states that there will be rejoicing in Jerusalem, a person dying at the age of one hundred years will be regarded as a child. It declares of the inhabitants: “They shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree shall be the days of my people, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for calamity; for they are the seed of the blessed of Jehovah, and their offspring with them” (Isa 65:21–23). The passage closes with a description of millennial conditions, “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith Jehovah” (Isa 65:25). Obviously, only a people in mortal flesh build houses, plant, work, and have offspring. The concluding chapter of Isaiah continues the same theme. There will be judgment upon the wicked but peace to Jerusalem like a river. The description is not of a people translated or resurrected, but a people purged and judged worthy, though still in the flesh, of entrance into the millennial earth.

The best answer to the problem of who will populate the millennial earth is an obvious one. If the church is translated before the tribulation period, there is ample time for a new generation of believers to come into being from Jew and Gentile background to qualify for entrance into the millennial kingdom at the second coming of Christ. The problem of populating the millennium is thereby quickly solved and many relating Scriptures are given a natural and literal interpretation. It is significant that Alexander Reese in his

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closely reasoned attack upon the pretribulation position³⁹ finds it convenient to ignore this major objection to posttribulationism entirely. What is true of Reese is true also of other posttribulationists.⁴⁰ The posttribulationist position leads logically to an abandonment of premillennialism altogether, or requires such spiritualization of the millennium until it becomes indistinguishable from an amillennial interpretation. Premillennialism demands an interval between the translation and the second coming to make possible a generation of believers who will enter the millennium.

This conclusion is confirmed by a study of the two major judgments which take place in connection with the establishment of the kingdom, which are related to the entire human race: (1) the judgment of Israel (Ezek 20:34–38), and (2) the judgment of the Gentiles (Matt 25:31–46). These judgments deal with the living Gentiles and Israelites who are on the earth at the time of the second advent.

According to Ezekiel 20:34–38, at the time of the second advent a regathering of Israel is brought about. It obviously takes considerable time—many weeks, if not months—to effect, but it is carried out precisely as the prophets indicate. Isaiah states that every means of transportation is pressed into use: “They shall bring all your brethren out of all the nations for an oblation unto Jehovah, upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters and upon mules, and upon dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith Jehovah...” (Isa 66:20). That the regathering is to be complete to the last man—obviously not fulfilled by previous regathering—is declared in Ezekiel 39:25–29. It is explicitly stated, “I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there,” *i.e.*, among the nations (Ezek 39:28).

The regathering process completed, a judgment of Israel is described in Ezekiel 20:34–38. God declares: “I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; and I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me...they shall not enter into the land of Israel...” (Ezek 20:37–38).

In the light of the details of this judgment, it should be clear to any impartial observer that the judgment deals with Israelites still in the flesh, not translated or resurrected. Further, the process takes time because of the geographic regathering that is involved. It is an event related to the establishment of the millennial kingdom but is subsequent by some weeks or months to the actual second advent. It relates to Israel racially alone and includes both believers and unbelievers. The judgment consists in putting to death all the rebels or unbelievers, leaving only the believers to enter the promised land.

³⁹ *The Approaching Advent of Christ.*

⁴⁰ No answer is given to this argument and it is not mentioned in Fromow's *Triumph through Tribulation.*

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This multitude of details sets this judgment apart from the translation of the church as much as any two events could be distinguished. The translation takes place in a moment. The translation relates only to believers, and it leaves unbelievers exactly as they were before. The translation of the church has no relation to promises of the land of Israel. The Ezekiel judgment has the promises of possession of the promised land as a primary objective—determining those qualified for entrance. The translation of the church is followed by arrival in heaven. The believers of Ezekiel 20 enter the land, not heaven, in bodies of flesh, not immortal bodies. The translation concerns Jewish and Gentile believers alike. This judgment has to do only with Israel.

It should be further evident that, if the translation of the church took place simultaneously with the second advent to establish the kingdom, the Ezekiel judgment would be both impossible and unnecessary as the separation of believers from unbelievers would have already taken place. It may therefore be concluded from the nature of the judgment of Israel that an interval is required between the translation of the church and the judgment of Israel during which a new generation of Israelites who believe in Christ as Savior and Messiah comes into being and who are waiting for His second advent to the earth to establish the millennial kingdom.

A similar conclusion is reached by the study of the judgment of the Gentiles described in Matthew 25:31–46. Taking the Ezekiel passage and the Matthew passage together, the whole population of the earth at the second coming of Christ is in view. If all Israelites are dealt with in Ezekiel, all the others described as the “nations” or the Gentiles are in the Matthew judgment. In the Matthew passage, like that of Ezekiel 20, no mention is made of either resurrection or translation, though both are often read into the passage by posttribulationists somewhat desperate to combine all the passages.

The separation of Matthew 25 is similar to that of Ezekiel 20. The unbelievers, described as the “goats,” are cast into everlasting fire by means of physical death, whereas the “sheep” enter the kingdom prepared for them—the millennial kingdom. While the judgment in Matthew 25, as in Ezekiel 20, is based on outward works, it is true here as elsewhere in Scripture that works are taken as evidence of salvation. The good works of the “sheep” in befriending the “brethren” (the Jewish people) is an act of kindness which no one but a believer in Christ would perform during the tribulation when Christian as well as Jew is hated by all the world. Ironside interprets the passage: “But this judgment, like the other, is according to works. The *sheep* are those in whom divine life is manifested by their loving care for those who belong to Christ. The *goats* are bereft of this, and speak of the unrepentant, who did not respond to Christ’s messengers.”⁴¹ The result of the

⁴¹ H.A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew*, 337-38.

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judgment of the Gentiles is the purging of all unbelievers, with the believers, who are thereby left, granted the privilege of entrance into the kingdom.

The judgment of the Gentiles is an individual judgment, though some premillenarians have seen in it a description of national judgment. This misconception has arisen from the English translation where the Greek word *ethne* is rendered “nation.” It is, of course, the same word precisely as would be used for Gentiles individually. Inasmuch as the nature of the judgment is individual, however, the use of “nation” in a political sense is misleading. No national group can qualify as a group as either a “sheep” or a “goat” nation, and no nation inherits either the kingdom or everlasting fire for its works. Eternal judgment must of necessity apply to the individual.

A comparison of this judgment of Gentiles again confirms the fact that this is an entirely different event than the translation of the church. This is, first of all, demonstrated by the time of the judgment. It occurs *after* the second advent and *after* a throne is set up in the earth. The translation of the church, according to all viewpoints, takes place *before* Christ actually arrives on earth. The judgment of the Gentiles results in the purging of unbelievers out from among believers. The translation of the church takes believers out from among unbelievers, and leaves unbelievers untouched. This judgment also distinguishes the individuals involved on a racial basis.

The “brethren” refers to Israel. The “nations” refers to non-Israelites. At the translation of the church, by contrast, there are no racial distinctions whatever. The judgment of the Gentiles deals primarily with unbelievers who are cast into everlasting fire. The reward given to believers at the judgment of the Gentiles is entrance into the millennial kingdom. Christians in this present age enter a spiritual kingdom when born again, and are never brought into judgment relative to entrance into the millennium. Believers at the judgment of the Gentiles enter a millennial kingdom at the time of their judgment, following the second advent.

In the judgment of the Gentiles and the judgment of Israel, the mass of detail points to the fact that separation of saved from unsaved is accomplished by a series of judgments occurring chronologically after the second advent. The judgment deals only with those living on the earth at the time of the second advent. None of those involved are translated or resurrected. Their reward is entrance into the millennial kingdom. At every point of comparison the evidence points to the translation of the church as a prior event utterly different in character and which requires an interval of some years between it and the judgments of Israel and the Gentiles. It may be therefore concluded that the interval between the translation and the second coming is absolutely necessary for the creation of a new generation of believers in Christ, composed of both Jews and Gentiles who retain

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their national identification and who will await the second advent of Christ and the millennial kingdom to follow.

Argument from the contrasts of the translation and the second coming. The preceding discussion has offered many inherent contrasts between the translation of the church and the second coming of Christ to establish the millennial kingdom. These contrasts are such as to make any harmony of these two events an impossibility. Those who attempt it must resort to wholesale spiritualization of details that clash and avoidance of striking differences in general character.

These contrasts can be stated by comparison of details of the translation designated (a), and details of the second coming designated as (b). (a) At the time of the translation, the saints will meet the Lord in the air. (b) At the time of the second coming, Christ will return to the Mount of Olives which on that occasion will undergo a great transformation, a valley being formed to the east of Jerusalem where the Mount of Olives was formerly located (Zech 14:4–5). (a) At the coming of Christ for the church, the living saints are translated. (b) At the coming of Christ to establish His kingdom, there is no translation whatever. (a) At the translation of the church, Christ returns with the saints to heaven. (b) At the second coming, Christ remains on the earth and reigns as King. (a) At the time of the translation, the earth is not judged and sin continues. (b) At the time of the second coming, sin is judged and righteousness fills the earth.

(a) The translation is before the day of wrath from which the church is promised deliverance. (b) The second coming follows the great tribulation and outpoured judgment and brings them to climax and culmination in the establishment of the millennial kingdom. (a) The translation is described as an imminent event. (b) The second coming will follow definite prophesied signs. (a) The translation of the church is revealed only in the New Testament. (b) The second coming of Christ is the subject of prophecy in both Testaments. (a) The translation concerns only the saved of this age. (b) The second coming deals with saved and unsaved. (a) At the translation, only those in Christ are affected. (b) At the second coming, not only men are affected but Satan and his hosts are defeated and Satan is bound.

While it is evident that there are some similarities in the two events, these do not prove that they are the same. There are similarities also between the first and the second coming of Christ, but these have been separated by almost two thousand years. These similarities confused the Old Testament prophets but are easily deciphered by us today. Undoubtedly after the church is translated, tribulation saints will be able to see the distinction of the coming for translation and the coming to establish the kingdom in a similar clarity.

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Before considering the opposing schools of thought represented in the posttribulation and midtribulation viewpoints, it is necessary first to examine an offshoot of pretribulationism known as the partial rapture view. While rejected by the overwhelming majority of pretribulationists and considered by them a doctrinal aberration, its issues must be presented before leaving the general field of pretribulationism. To this the next discussion will be devoted.⁴²

Partial Rapture Theory

Definition of the Theory

It is generally held among pretribulationists that the entire church, composed of all believers in this age, will be translated and resurrected at the coming of Christ for them preceding the tribulation. There has arisen in the last century, however, a small group of pretribulationists who contend that only those who are faithful in the church will be raptured or translated and the rest will either be raptured sometime during the tribulation or at its end. As stated by one of its adherents: "The saints will be raptured in groups during the tribulation as they are prepared to go."⁴³ He states further: "The basis of translation must be grace or reward. ...We believe that frequent exhortations in the Scriptures to watch, to be faithful, to be ready for Christ's coming, to live Spirit-filled lives, all suggest that translation is a reward."⁴⁴ The theory includes the concept that only the faithful saints will be resurrected at the first resurrection.

Historical Background

The modern theory of partial rapture seems to have originated in the writings of Robert Govett who published a book setting forth the theory as early as 1853.⁴⁵ In this work he expounds his view that participation in the kingdom is conditional and depends upon worthy conduct. The most able exponent of the theory in the twentieth century is G.H. Lang.⁴⁶ Others have made a significant contribution to the propagation of the theory. D.M. Panton, as editor of *The Dawn* (London), uses his publication to promote this teaching. Such writers as Ira E. David, Sarah Foulkes Moore, William Leask, and C. G. A.

⁴²*Bibliotheca Sacra*. 1998 (electronic edition). Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 112:446, April-June 1955, 97-106.

⁴³ Ira E. David, "Translation: When Does It Occur?" *The Dawn*, November 15, 1935, 358.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 358-59.

⁴⁵ Cf. Robert Govett, *Entrance into the Kingdom*.

⁴⁶ Cf. G.H. Lang, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ; Firstborn Sons: Their Rights and Risks*.

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Gibson-Smith contribute to *The Dawn* articles in support of this theory. For the most part, however, the view is limited to a few adherents who are generally treated as heterodox by other pretribulationists.

General Reasons for Rejecting a Partial Rapture

It is commonly held by evangelical Christians that salvation is by grace rather than a reward for good works. The believer in Christ is justified by faith, and receives the many benefits of salvation quite apart from merit or worthiness on his part. This is normally carried over into the doctrine of translation and resurrection. Most pretribulationists as well as most posttribulationists consider the translation and resurrection of the saints on this basis. By contrast, the partial rapture teaching transfers both resurrection and translation from a work of grace to a work of reward for faithfulness. In so contending, they wrest principal Scriptures and misapply others. Opposition to the partial rapture point of view springs not only from particular texts but from the broad doctrine of the nature of salvation itself. It becomes therefore more than an argument about prophecy. It has its roots deep in the general theological perspective of the respective parties.

The opposition to the partial rapture view is also related to ecclesiology or the doctrine of the church. Most evangelicals distinguish the true church from the merely professing element. It is granted that outward conformity and organizational membership does not guarantee any blessing in the prophetic program. Pretribulationists as well as posttribulationists distinguish divine dealing with those genuinely saved and those who only profess salvation. Partial rapturists, however, are quite different in point of view from that commonly held. For them there are two classes of genuinely saved people—those worthy of translation, and those not worthy. They therefore divide the body of Christ into two groups on a works principle. By contrast, the Scriptures teach that the body of Christ, composed of all true believers, is a unit and is given promises as such. It is inconceivable if the church is formed by grace that it should be divided by works.

The passages in Scripture [All quotations of Scripture, unless otherwise indicated, are from the American Standard Version (1901).] dealing with the translation and resurrection of the church do not teach a partial rapture. Those for whom Christ is coming according to John 14:3 are those who are identified as believing in John 14:1. Those translated and those resurrected at the last trump of 1 Corinthians 15:52 are described as “we all” in 1 Corinthians 15:51. According to 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, those resurrected are described as “the dead in Christ” (v. 16) and the “we” who are caught up are identified as those who “believe that Jesus died and rose again” (v. 14). The explicit teaching of Scripture points to the conclusion that the translation includes all living saints and the resurrection includes all the “dead in Christ.” Other Scriptures confirm that

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translation is not dependent on expectancy or watchfulness (1 Thess 1:9–10; 2:19; 5:4–11; Rev 22:12). Partial rapturists, however, contend for their point of view using various Scripture portions which are interpreted as sustaining their doctrine. These must be examined before the full character of their teaching becomes apparent.

Scriptural Basis for Partial Rapture Theory

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Most of the Scriptural basis for the partial rapture theory is found by its adherents in exhortations to watch or look for the coming of the Lord coupled with the teaching that some who fail to watch will not be ready when He comes. Passages commonly used include Matthew 24:40–51; 25:13; Mark 13:33–37; Luke 20:34–36; 21:36; Philippians 3:10–12; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; 2 Timothy 4:8; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:24–28; Revelation 3:3, 12:1–6. In citing these passages, little distinction is observed between references to Israel and references to the church, and passages referring to the second coming of Christ to establish the millennial kingdom are freely applied to the rapture or translation. In fact, many of the points of view of the partial rapture adherents are also held by posttribulationists. A study of these passages as interpreted by the partial rapturists will show the confusion of interpretation.

Matthew 24:40–51; Mark 13:33–37. The Matthew passage is essentially an exhortation to watch. The theme is stated, “Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh” (v 42). A further command is given, “Therefore be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh” (v. 44). The one not watching is described as one to be cut asunder and given the portion of hypocrites (v. 51). This passage is properly interpreted as belonging to the second coming rather than to the church, though expositors in general are not always of one mind on this. The people in view are the Israelite nation. Of these, some are watching and are faithful, taking care of the household of God. They are contrasted to those who beat their fellow servants, and “eat and drink with the drunken” (v. 48). It is obvious that something more than mere carelessness is in view. The faithfulness of those watching is evidence of true faith in Christ, whereas the unfaithfulness of those who are drunken is indicative of failure to believe to the saving of the soul. While works are in view, they are indicative of vital faith or its lack. In any case, there is nothing whatever said about the rapture or translation of the faithful. It is doubtful if there is any specific reference at all to the rapture or translation in the entire context of Matthew 24–25.

Partial rapturists usually seize upon Matthew 24:41 as substantiation of their position: “Then shall two men be in the field; one is taken, and one is left.” It is argued that the one taken is the one translated. Robert Govett states that the Greek word for “take”

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(paralambano) means “to take as a companion” — “ordinarily the result of friendship.”⁴⁷ In this he finds a contrast to the Greek word for “took away” (eren), describing the judgment on unbelievers in Noah’s day (Matt 24:39). He offers confirmation in that paralambano is used in John 14:3 of the rapture, “will receive you unto myself.” The one left, according to Govett, is left to go through the tribulation.

A careful study of the usage here, however, however, does not sustain this exegesis. The context is Jewish, and does not refer to the church at all. The discussion is dealing with the end of the age, i.e., the entire interadvent age, not the church period as such. The *terminus ad quem* is the second coming, not the translation of the church. The Greek word paralambano is not specifically one describing a friendly relation. It is also used in John 19:17: “They took Jesus therefore: and he went out, bearing the cross for himself....” This act of taking Jesus was certainly not a friendly association and compares to a taking in wrath. The act of taking away in Matthew 24:41 is best interpreted as the same as in verse 39. In both the one taken away is taken in judgment. This is precisely what is done at the second coming of Christ when those who remain enter the blessing of the millennium, and those taken away suffer judgment. The evidence, then, for a partial rapture in this passage is completely dissolved upon examination of the evidence. The parallel passage in Mark 13:33–37 has, if anything, less evidence than the Matthew account, and it is answered in the same way.

Luke 21:36. This passage is cited by Lang as one of the conclusive proofs for the partial rapture theory.⁴⁸ The exhortation it presents is another command to watch: “But watch ye at every season, making supplication, that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.” Appeal is made particularly to the King James Version which uses the expression, “that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things....” Lang summarizes his argument in these words: “This declares distinctly: (1) That escape is possible from all those things of which Christ had been speaking, that is, from the whole End Times. (2) That that day of testing will be universal, and inevitable by any then on earth, which involves the removal from the earth of any who are to escape it. (3) That those who are to escape will be taken to where He, the Son of Man, will then be, that is, at the throne of the Father in the heavens. They will stand before Him there. (4) That there is a fearful peril of disciples becoming worldly in heart and so being enmeshed in that last period. (5) That hence it is needful to watch,

⁴⁷ Robert Govett, “One Taken and One Left,” *The Dawn*, 12:11, February 15, 1936, p. 516. The article lists the author only by the initials “R.G.”

⁴⁸ G.H. Lang, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 88-89.

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and to pray ceaselessly, that so we may prevail over all obstacles and dangers and thus escape that era.”⁴⁹

All pretribulationists will agree that escape from the coming time of trial is provided for believers in Christ. All also agree that those who believe in Christ during the tribulation itself, while not kept out of the period, may have deliverance from it at the coming of the Lord to establish His kingdom. The point of dispute lies entirely in the conclusion that some true believers will be left to go through the tribulation while others are translated before it comes to pass.

While the exegesis of this passage is admittedly difficult, a careful study of the context provides a clue for its interpretation. The context has to do with signs preceding the second coming, obviously addressed to people who will be living on earth at that time. A possible interpretation based on the contrast of “ye” in verse 36 and “them” in verse 35 would be that the exhortation in question is addressed to the church in the days preceding the tribulation. However, the frequent interchange of the second and third persons in the entire passage does not provide much basis for this distinction (cf. second and third persons in vv. 27–28). The larger context deals with those living in the days of the signs and the exhortations largely concern them (cf. “look” in v. 28) rather than the church of the present age. The safest course would be to identify verse 36 as directed to those in the tribulation who anticipate the coming of the Lord to establish His kingdom. They indeed will “watch,” for His coming is their only hope. They certainly will pray, for only by divine help will they survive the period. Note should be taken that this passage does not speak of deliverance from the *period* or the *hour* of trial (cf. Rev 3:10), but only of deliverance from “all these things that shall come to pass.”

It should be observed that here, as in other passages often used by the partial rapturists, the rapture is not specifically mentioned, indeed is not indicated at all. Lang is inserting in the text what it does not say when he states that to stand before the Son of Man must necessarily mean in heaven. All men will stand before Christ *on earth* at the second coming (cf. Matt 25:32). To press the idea of escaping judgment as indicated in this passage to prove a partial rapture requires invention of the principal components of the doctrine. It is best to conclude that this passage does not teach a partial rapture because it does not refer to the rapture at all.

Matthew 25:1–13. The parable of the ten virgins is variously interpreted by pretribulationists, some taking it as referring to the tribulation saints⁵⁰ and others to the

⁴⁹ *Loc. cit.*

⁵⁰ L.S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, V:131ff.

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church.⁵¹ Partial rapturists, assuming that it refers to the church, find in the passage the concept of a selective translation—the foolish virgins being left behind because unprepared, the wise virgins being translated because ready. The answer given to the partial rapturists depends upon the interpretation of the passage as a whole. If Chafer is correct that the passage deals with the end of the interadvent age, the tribulation, rather than the church, then the passage has no relation to the partial rapture doctrine. Much is in favor of Chafer’s position. The church is ordinarily the bride, and in a figure of a wedding feast it would be incongruous to conceive of the church as represented by maidens attending the feast. The passage itself uses none of the characteristic terms relating to the church, such as *bride*, *body*, or the expression *in Christ*. There is no reference whatever to translation or resurrection. The bridegroom comes to the place where the virgins are waiting in an earthly scene and remains in that earthly scene as far as the figure is concerned. These and many other observations point to excluding this passage from consideration.

However, even if the virgins represent the church in the present age, where is the proof that this is the true church, the company of those who are saved? As commonly interpreted by such writers as H.A. Ironside,⁵² the virgins represent the professing church. True believers are identified as having oil in their lamps, typical of the Holy Spirit. Mere professors have the appearance but no oil, that is, are not genuinely regenerated and indwelt by the Spirit. If watchfulness is necessary for worthiness, as partial rapturists characteristically argue, then none of the ten virgins qualify for “they all slumbered and slept.” The command to “watch” in verse 13 has, then, the specific meaning of being prepared with oil—being genuinely regenerated and indwelt by the Spirit rather than having unusual spirituality. The clear teaching is that “watching” is not enough. This passage would serve to refute the partial rapturists instead of sustaining their viewpoint. Only by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit can one be qualified for entrance into the wedding feast, but all the wise virgins enter the feast.

Luke 20:34–36. This passage is used by the partial rapturists mostly because of the expression “they that are accounted worthy to attain that world [age]...are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection” (Luke 20:35–36). The context indicates that the passage deals with the question of the state of those raised from the dead. Those who are counted worthy of the resurrection of the righteous at the beginning of the millennial age indicated in the passage are evidently the saved who have died and are at that time raised from the dead. Not only is the idea of partial rapture foreign to the passage, but the passage does not deal with the subject of rapture at all. If the rapture takes place before

⁵¹ H.A. Ironside, *Matthew*, 327.

⁵² *Loc. cit.*

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the tribulation, this scene is related to the posttribulation resurrection. According to Daniel 12:1–2, at that time—the end of the tribulation—“every one that shall be found written in the book” will be delivered, whether living or dead. There is no partial rapture here nor is the resurrection of the righteous divided on the principle of being worthy. This passage can therefore be excluded from the argument entirely.

Philippians 3:10–12. In this passage Paul speaks of his surpassing desire to know Christ, “if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead” (v. 11). It is the contention of partial rapturists that Paul had in mind the necessity of faithfulness in the hope of meriting resurrection at the time of the first resurrection, i.e., before the millennium, instead of waiting until later. Govett translates Philippians 3:10–11 as follows: “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if by any means I might attain to the select resurrection from among the dead.”⁵³

It is commonly accepted by pretribulationists that the resurrection to which Paul referred was indeed a “select resurrection,” but Govett’s translation is interpretation rather than a literal translation. A literal translation would be “to attain to the resurrection the one out of the dead.” It is clear that the passage refers to a resurrection which includes only the righteous dead, though this is usually denied by amillenarians. The resurrection in view is undoubtedly the resurrection of the “dead in Christ” (1 Thess 4:16). Paul’s ambition was not, however that he might die and then, perchance, be accounted worthy of resurrection at that time. His hope was that he might attain to it in the sense of being still alive when the event took place, which would mean that he would be translated rather than resurrected. Paul had no doubt that he would be included in the event. Later he wrote Timothy, “I am not ashamed; for I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tim 1:12).

The resurrection of which Paul speaks is not of reward as Govett argues. Govett writes: “It is evident at a glance, that the resurrection which the apostle so earnestly sought, was not the general resurrection. The wicked shall partake of that, whether they desire it or not. Paul then could not express any doubts of his attaining to that, or speak of it as an object of hope. It remains then, that it be a peculiar resurrection: *the resurrection of reward*, obtained by the just, while the wicked remain in their graves.”⁵⁴

In refutation of this error, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 is plain: the resurrection will include all the dead in Christ, all who by grace through faith have trusted Christ and have even now

⁵³ R. Govett, *Entrance into the Kingdom*. I:31.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, I:34.

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been given this new position in Christ in place of their old estate in Adam. There is no justification for building upon Paul's hope a resurrection of reward to be attained only by a small portion of the church of Christ born of the Spirit and washed in the blood of the Lamb. Resurrection is a part of the gift of God, never a reward for human works; however, it may justify faithfulness and even martyrdom on the part of the believer. Paul's point of view is that if the resurrection is sure, what does it matter if the road before him is one of suffering and even death. The means, however difficult, are justified by the end.

The partial rapture view of this passage brings out in bold relief that their position not only involves a partial rapture but a partial resurrection of believers. While believers may not be raised at the same time, the principle of the stages of resurrection—some at the translation of the church, some after the tribulation—is based upon the sovereign program of God for the church and for the Old Testament saints, not upon a works principle or evaluation of faithfulness among the saints. Rewards there shall be, but resurrection is promised all believers.

1 Thessalonians 5:6. This passage is another exhortation to watch: "So then let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober." The contrast here again is not between some believers who watch and other believers who do not. Rather, believers are exhorted to do that which is in keeping with their expectation—watch for the coming of the Lord. Those who sleep are obviously the unsaved as described in *1 Thessalonians 5:7*: "For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that are drunken are drunken in the night." By contrast, those who "are of the day," i.e., those who are true believers, should have lives in keeping with their faith. This passage does not teach any more than the others considered that there will be a partial rapture of some believers. The distinction is between those saved and those unsaved.

2 Timothy 4:8. This verse is a glorious affirmation of Paul's hope of reward: "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved his appearing." This passage clearly prophesies reward for Paul and others who "love his appearing." This revelation says nothing of a partial rapture as a part of that reward. It is rather that all believers in Christ are raptured, and then apportioned rewards according to their works.

Titus 2:13. The hope of the believer is expressed graphically in this familiar verse: "Looking for that blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." This attitude of expectation is normal for true Christians, but is not here or elsewhere made a condition for being raptured. Only by reading into the passage a preconceived doctrine can the partial rapture be found here.

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Hebrews 9:24–28. The entrance of Christ into heaven and his return when he “shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation” (v. 28) is the theme of this portion of Scripture. Partial rapturists seize upon the phrase, “to them that wait for him,” as indicating that only such believers as are actively waiting for Christ will be raptured. The obvious answer is that those who are here described are Christians pictured in characteristic attitude of waiting or anticipating the completion of the salvation of which they now have the first fruits. All Christians worthy of the name anticipate the future completion of God’s program of salvation for them. The phrase upon which partial rapturists put so much emphasis is more of an aside than the main revelation of the passage. The main point is that Christ is going to return and complete at his second coming the salvation which He provided in His death at His first coming. The figure is that of the priest who, having sacrificed, goes into the holy of holies and then appears the second time to those on whose behalf He has been ministering. In the sense used in this passage all true Christians are waiting for Christ in His second coming.

Revelation 3:3. This passage, addressed to the church at Sardis, is another command to watch: “Remember therefore how thou has received and didst hear; and keep it and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.” This passage is addressed to a local church at Sardis in which, no doubt, there were both true Christians and merely professing ones. The church had at one time a live testimony but had slipped from this (vv. 1–2). The challenge now is to correct this fundamental spiritual fault lest Christ come in judgment when they are not ready for Him. The judgment which will fall upon the church at Sardis will obviously deal with those who are unsaved. Those who do not heed the message of Christ and ignore the warning are by so much demonstrating their fundamental lack of faith and salvation.

Revelation 3:10. This favorite text of partial rapturists is a promise to the church at Philadelphia: “Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.” D.M. Panton declares in connection with his support of the partial rapture theory based upon this text: “He bases it solely on the ‘kept’ word. He flings open the door to rapture into heaven.... Second Advent truth, on which our Lord bases the Angel’s escape, is far from being ‘kept’ by all the children of God...the Lord thus bases rapture foursquare on fidelity, not conversion.”⁵⁵

This passage brings out clearly that the partial rapture theory depends upon a works principle—the rapture not a fruit of salvation but a reward for good works. As in other

⁵⁵ D.M. Panton, “An Open Door,” *The Dawn*, 26:11, November 1948, 327.

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passages, the problem is whether this is the fundamental teaching of Scripture. Salvation is often traced to faith alone—as in Romans 4, and in other passages the evidence of salvation, good works, is pointed to as necessary to salvation (James 2:21–26). The promise of Revelation 3:10 falls into the same category as James 2. The evidence of faith, keeping the Word of God, is the ground for the promise. Here as elsewhere, however, the distinction is not between believers with works and believers without works. The main thought of the passage is that those without works are not true believers. To accept the principle of translation on the basis of works upsets the whole doctrine of justification and absence of all condemnation for the believer. Further, it vitiates all the promises given to the church as a whole relative to both resurrection and translation. The prominence of works as evidence of faith can never be proof of the negation of faith as the sole ground of the grace of God.

The works principle immediately breaks down when the question is asked: How much works? Evidently no Christian lives perfectly and the Philadelphian Church is no exception. To make the one doctrine of the Lord's return one and the same as to "keep the word of my patience," is entirely unjustified. Many commentators identify the phrase, "word of my patience," as being simply a reference to the steadfastness of the Philadelphians under trial.⁵⁶

James Moffatt writes: "The precise sense therefore is not 'my word about patience' (*i.e.*, my counsel of patience as the supreme virtue of these latter days, so Weiss, Bousset, etc.), but 'the word, or the preaching, of that patience which refers to me' (*i.e.*, the patient endurance with which, amid present trials, Christ is to be served; so Alford, Spitta, Holtzm.). See Ps xxxviii (xxxix)... The second reason for praising the Philadelphian Christians is their loyal patience under persecution, as well as the loyal confession of Christ (ver. 8) which had possibly brought on that persecution."

⁵⁷The interpretation of the partial rapture is, then, an arbitrary identification of an expression that seems clearly to have a broader meaning than the hope of the Lord's return. The basic area of disagreement, however, is whether a Christian saved by grace can be denied translation or resurrection at the same time as those to whom He is joined in the one body of Christ.

Revelation 12:1–6. This final passage to be considered, while it does not exhaust the Scriptures used by the partial rapturists, will suffice to show the main Scriptural background for their theory. This revelation of the woman describes her as "arrayed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" (Rev

⁵⁶ Cf. F.W. Grant, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 206.

⁵⁷ James Moffatt, *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, V:367–68.

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12:1). The child born to this woman is described as “a man child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and unto his throne” (Rev 12:5). The most obvious interpretation is that the woman is Israel and the child is Christ. Partial rapturists contend that the woman is the church and the man child represents the faithful ones who are raptured before the tribulation. Upon the rapture of the faithful ones, the beast is pictured as making war with “the rest of her seed” (Rev 12:17). G.H. Lang in presenting this view claims that this interpretation of chapter 12 of Revelation is the crux of the whole book: “This c. 12 is a *crux interpretum* for the whole *Revelation* and the Times of the End, especially in relation to the people of God to be then living....” The two principal schools of futurist expositors have both failed; the one insisting that all Christians must be taken from the earth before the time of the Beast, and the other by insisting that no saints can escape that period.⁵⁸

The apparent difficulty with the partial rapturist interpretation is that their point of view is by no means necessary. If the woman is obviously Israel and the child is obviously Christ, why attempt to make them anything else? The description of Christ in Revelation 12:5 is so clear that there should be no argument about it. Israel, of course, has a physical seed, represented in Revelation 12:17. There is no justification whatever for dragging in the church as individuals composed largely of Gentiles in racial origin.

It is true that the church is positionally in Christ and some pretribulationists have argued that the church in Christ is also caught up and that the rapture is prefigured in Revelation 12:5. Ironside says, “The man-child symbolizes both Head and body—the complete Christ.”⁵⁹ Even if this teaching be allowed, it is clear that all, not part, of the man child is caught up. The “rest of the seed” are neither Christ nor the church, but the physical seed of Israel unsaved at the time of the rapture and thereby thrust into the tribulation period of which this passage speaks. The context gives no ground whatever for the conclusion that the man child represents the spiritual element of the church raptured while the unspiritual element is left behind.

Conclusion

Opposition to the partial rapture view in addition to refutation of their interpretation of key Scriptures is based upon three broad principles: First, the partial rapture view is based upon a works principle in opposition to Scriptural teaching on grace. The translation and resurrection of the church is a part of its salvation provided by grace and is a reward only in the sense that it is a fruit of faith in Christ. To accept a works principle for this important aspect of salvation is to undermine the whole concept of justification

⁵⁸ G.H. Lang, *op. cit.*, p. 219; cf. pp. 197-219 for entire discussion.

⁵⁹ H.A. Ironside. *Lectures on the Revelation*, 212.

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by faith through grace, the presence of the Holy Spirit as the seal of God “unto the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30), and the entire tremendous undertaking of God on behalf of those who trust Him. The issue of reward is properly settled at the judgment seat of Christ, not before in a partial translation resulting in the infliction of the tribulation on other believers.

Second, the partial rapture view divides the body of Christ. While the Scriptures portray difference in God’s dealing with saints of the Old Testament as compared with saints of the present age, and also a difference between the church and tribulation saints, there is no Scriptural justification for dividing the divine unity of the body of Christ joined in organic union with Christ and all fellow believers. A division such as partial rapturists teach is unthinkable in view of the doctrine of the one body.

The third objection to the partial rapturist position is the fact that they ignore plain teaching concerning the translation of all true believers when the event takes place. Attention was called earlier to the “we all” of 1 Corinthians 15:51 and the expression “the dead in Christ” in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. The identity of those translated is described as those who “believe that Jesus died and rose again” (1 Thess 4:14). Confirming Scriptures are found elsewhere as well (1 Thess 1:9–10; 2:19; 5:4–11; Rev 22:12). The partial rapture view has been embraced by only a small fragment of evangelical Christians and has not been recognized by any evangelical Protestant group. It is an interpretation limited to a few and cannot be regarded as within the bounds of normal Biblical premillennialism.⁶⁰

Posttribulationism

Posttribulationism has long been a common doctrine held by the majority of the church. Most premillenarians today, however, hold to the pretribulational translation of the church. As ordinarily defined, posttribulationism is the teaching that the church will be translated *after* the predicted tribulation, and therefore its adherents believe that the church must pass through this prophesied time of trouble. Posttribulationism is the ordinary view of practically all amillenarians and postmillenarians. It is embraced by Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic; it is followed by many Protestants, conservative as well as modern liberals. Posttribulationism, as far as the church as a whole is concerned, is the majority view. Among premillenarians, however, the majority accept the pretribulational position, though at the present time there is a resurgence of

⁶⁰ *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 1998 (electronic edition). Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 112:447, July-September 1955, 193-208.

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posttribulationism. Generally speaking, pretribulationism is an outgrowth of premillennial interpretation of the Scriptures and is properly considered a teaching within this point of view. Very rarely is it encountered outside premillennialism. To a large extent, pretribulationism depends upon much the same arguments and principles of interpretation as characterize premillennialism, while posttribulationism fits other millennial views.

Variations of Posttribulationism

While posttribulationism in itself is a simple concept, so many variations are found within the general teaching that it is difficult to affirm a norm. Two prevailing concepts account for most viewpoints within posttribulationism: (1) the teaching that the entire present age is the tribulation; (2) the teaching that the tribulation will occur at the end of the present age preceding the translation and second advent of Christ. These two concepts are seldom kept in strict distinction, but describe the two tendencies. The former requires more spiritualization of Scripture than the latter.

George L. Rose declares plainly in his defense of posttribulationism that the tribulation began with the early church: “The record left us in the book of The Acts of the Apostles leaves no room to doubt that, ‘tribulation’ began almost as soon as the Church was born.... At the time of Stephen’s death ‘there was a GREAT PERSECUTION against the church which was at Jerusalem...Saul made havock of the church, entering into every house, arresting men and women committed them to prison’ (Acts 8:1–3). *This ‘great persecution’ mentioned in Acts 8:1, is called ‘tribulation’ in Acts 11:19 therefore, ‘great persecution’ is ‘great tribulation.’* The same Greek word, *thlipsis*, being used in the same manner which Jesus used it in Matt 24:21, in speaking of ‘great tribulation’...”⁶¹ On the basis of this concept of the tribulation, there is no room left for argument—the church is already in the tribulation and has been since the first century. The whole issue is settled by identifying the great tribulation with the trials of the church throughout the present age.

Fromow dismisses the argument for pretribulationism in much the same fashion as Rose. Fromow states: “The Church is *already* passing through ‘the Great Tribulation.’... This term *Great* embraces the whole period of the Church’s course on earth, and should not be confined to the final 3½ years or the second half of Daniel’s seventieth week of intensest tribulation. It began with the first saints after the Fall, and includes all who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb until the Second Advent of Christ.”⁶² Fromow does Rose one better. Instead of beginning with the present age,

⁶¹ George L. Rose, *Tribulation Till Translation*, 68-69.

⁶² George H. Fromow, *Will the Church Pass Through the Tribulation?*, 2.

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Fromow begins the tribulation with Adam. Under either view, the church must obviously pass through the tribulation.

Most posttribulationists, however, do not attempt to settle the issue in such a summary manner. While pointing out, as pretribulationists also do, that there will be tribulation throughout the age, the many predictions of a particular “great tribulation” described as without precedent in its severity (Jer 30:7; Dan 12:1; Matt 24:21) is taken by the majority of posttribulationists as indicating a future period of great trouble occurring prior to the second advent of Christ. This point of view has the advantage in that those who hold this view are able to take with some literalness the description of the period, which would be impossible if it were the entire present age.

Representative of this viewpoint is the amillenarian Louis Berkhof who names five definite signs preceding the second advent, one of which is the great tribulation. Berkhof states: “Jesus certainly mentions the great tribulation as one of the signs of His coming and of the end of the world, Matt 24:3.”⁶³ Likewise, Norman S. McPherson, a premillenarian who defends the posttribulational position, writes: “This Great Tribulation is described as a time of unprecedented suffering to come upon the world. It will begin soon after the abomination, predicted by Daniel, stands in the holy place of the restored Jewish temple. It will be followed by the glorious appearing of Christ who comes for the purpose of gathering out of the world His elect.”⁶⁴ It may be concluded, therefore, that there are two widely differing viewpoints among posttribulationists respecting their definition of what it means for the church to pass through the tribulation. One understands the tribulation to refer to trouble which characterizes the present age. The other regards the tribulation as future.

The distinction between the two views within posttribulationism is nominal, however. Rose, after arguing strenuously that the church is already in the great tribulation, makes a sharp distinction between (1) “*the great tribulation*,” (2) “the unprecedented ‘time of trouble’,” and (3) the “‘great day of wrath’ which will come upon the ungodly.”⁶⁵ In a word, according to Rose, the great tribulation is the entire period of persecution of the elect since Adam; the “time of trouble” is a future period of trial for the elect; the “great day of wrath” is the future time of judgment of the wicked. By this device, Rose proves that the church, on the one hand, is already in the tribulation; on the other hand, is headed for a future time of trouble. He can therefore prove that the church will go through the

⁶³ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 700.

⁶⁴ Norman S. McPherson, *Triumph Through Tribulation*, 13.

⁶⁵ Rose, *op. cit.*, 76-77.

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tribulation, indeed is already in tribulation, and at the same time deny that the second coming is imminent.

Arguments for Posttribulationism

On one point all posttribulationists agree. If there is a future time of trouble just prior to the second advent, the church will need to pass through the period before the second advent of Christ brings deliverance. Pretribulationists, on the other hand, affirm that the church will be translated before that final time of trial. In order to weigh the strength of the posttribulationist position, twelve major arguments advanced in support of posttribulationism will be considered in an objective way with such criticism as may be required under each point.

Ad hominem argument. One of the unfortunate features of the argument for posttribulationism is the general tendency toward the *ad hominem* type of debate wherein attacks upon the persons who hold the pretribulation position are substituted for solid argument from the Scriptures. While posttribulationists are not alone in this, any impartial observer will soon find that posttribulationist literature, particularly of the controversial type, abounds in such references.

Alexander Reese, who has produced the classic defense of posttribulationism, gives large space in his argument for invective against pretribulationists. Hogg and Vine in their analysis of Reese's *ad hominem* argument summarize it as follows: "Mr. Reese does not seem to have made up his mind whether those whom he attacks so trenchantly are fools, or only knaves; his language, indeed, frequently suggests that they are both! Here are some things he says about them taken at random as the pages are turned: They are guilty of 'aggressive sophistry and fanatic exegesis,' and of 'paltry reasoning.' They prefer 'any rubbish to the true and obvious explanation' of a passage, and they 'wrest the Scriptures.' Their preference for the line of teaching they favor is 'no longer a question of exegesis.... It is simply a question of ethics....' They are not God-fearing readers of the Bible, but 'theorists,' 'showing little acquaintance with great exegesis.' Their teaching is 'inconsistent and ludicrous' in its 'absurdity.'... 'They wrote their errors on their broad phylacteries.'... They 'are misguided and misleading teachers.'"⁶⁶

Fromow writes: "We would lovingly ask, is there not a strain of weak-kneed, invertebrate, spineless sentiment in this idea of escaping tribulation?"⁶⁷ Oswald T. Allis in his discussion of pretribulationism takes as his one and main point: "1. *Pretribulationism*

⁶⁶ Hogg and Vine, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 9-10.

⁶⁷ Fromow, *op. cit.*, 4.

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*Appeals to Unworthy Motives.*⁶⁸ He describes pretribulationism as “an essential feature of Dispensationalism”⁶⁹ leading to “tragic results.”⁷⁰ Allis charges in his opening statement: “Before examining the evidence brought forward in support of this doctrine, it may be well to notice how singularly calculated it is to appeal to those selfish and unworthy impulses from which no Christian is wholly immune,” i.e., to avoid suffering in the tribulation.⁷¹ He further accuses pretribulationists as being “encouraged to view the present evil state of the world with composure which savors not a little of complacency.”⁷² While some of Allis’ argument is directed against the doctrine rather than the adherents, his main argument is that pretribulationists appeal “to selfish and unworthy impulses” and adopt a doctrine which has “tragic” and “radical” bearing on orthodox doctrine as a whole. Unless martyrdom is something to be earnestly desired and cheerfully sought, it is difficult to see why it is so contrary to Christian principles to desire to avoid these contingencies. While the charge is made that this has influenced pretribulationists, neither Allis nor anyone else has ever shown that the natural desire to avoid the awful period of the tribulation has ever been an influential factor in the doctrines related to pretribulationism. Rather, pretribulationism is based solely on principles of interpretation and exegetical reasons as Allis inadvertently admits when he defines pretribulationism as “an essential feature of Dispensationalism.”⁷³

The appeal to passion and prejudice and the open attempt to charge pretribulationists with unworthy and unspiritual motives is to slander the many godly men who have sincerely held this position after prayerfully seeking the teaching of the Scriptures on this point. It should be obvious to any impartial observer that the differences between pretribulationists and posttribulationists are doctrinal and exegetical, not spiritual, and that worthy and godly men are found on both sides of this question. This entire approach, given such prominence by posttribulationists, does their cause more harm than good and raises the question as to why such an approach is used if their doctrine has a sound exegetical basis. Inasmuch as posttribulationists themselves give this argument first place in prominence, it has been necessary to dispose of it in that order. Actually, posttribulationism is founded upon doctrinal premises which now may be discussed.

The historical argument. One of the strongest arguments of the posttribulationist view is the claim that pretribulationism is a new doctrine. Reese after citing a formidable array of ancient and modern scholars who were posttribulationists states: “The fact that so many

⁶⁸ Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, 207.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁷⁰ *Loc. cit.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁷² *Loc. cit.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 216.

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eminent men, after independent study of the Scriptures, reached similar conclusions regarding the subject of Christ's Coming and Kingdom, creates a strong presumption—on pre-millennial presuppositions—that such views are scriptural, and that nothing plainly taught in Scripture, and essential to the Church's hope, was overlooked."⁷⁴ He goes on to trace the rise of pretribulationism: "About 1830, however, a new school arose within the fold of Pre-millennialism that sought to overthrow what, since the Apostolic Age, have been considered by all pre-millennialists as established results, and to institute in their place a series of doctrines that had never been heard of before. The school I refer to is that of 'The Brethren' or 'Plymouth Brethren,' founded by J.N. Darby."⁷⁵ Similar quotations could be multiplied from other posttribulationists.

In making the charge, however, posttribulationists choose to ignore facts which greatly limit the pertinence of this point. Posttribulationists themselves consider the doctrine of the second advent a series of events, rather than one great climactic act of God. Rose in his posttribulational argument postulates a period of time between the translation of the church and the second advent proper in which "the great day of wrath" falls upon the wicked. He believes that between the rapture and the judgment of the nations (Matt 25) many will receive Christ as Savior: "But when Christ comes in power and great glory, and every eye shall see him; two things will take place within a very short time. First, the wilfully wicked will be destroyed with the brightness of His coming in the conflict that immediately occurs. Second, 'Multitudes that are in the valley of decision,' will immediately receive Christ."⁷⁶

According to Rose, the righteous in the judgment of the nations are those who receive Christ in the period between the rapture and the judgment of the nations. If it is possible within the framework of posttribulationism to have a series of events of which the rapture is in "the early morning of the 'day of the Lord,'"⁷⁷ why is it so unthinkable to move it still earlier in the series and make it precede the time of tribulation? If the church is to be distinguished from the righteous among the nations at the judgment of Matthew 25, why not distinguish the church from the tribulation saints as well?

The fact is that Reese, who was quoted earlier, has overstated the significance of the viewpoint of the early church relative to this question. There was no doctrine on this question which could be considered "established results." The early church believed in a coming time of trouble, in the imminent coming of the Lord, and the millennium to follow. How the coming of the Lord could be a daily expectation as is clearly indicated by the

⁷⁴ Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, 19.

⁷⁵ *Loc. cit.*

⁷⁶ Rose, *op. cit.*, 282.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 277.

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early Fathers, and at the same time have a lengthy series of events preceding the second advent, was apparently not discussed or ever resolved in the early church. If major doctrines like the Trinity and the procession of the Spirit took centuries to find acceptable statement, it is hardly to be expected that the problems of Eschatology would be all settled in the early centuries. The inroads of the spiritualizing principles of Origen, which caused the downfall of premillennialism in the third and fourth centuries along with the departure from the Scriptures which characterized the organized church until the Protestant Reformation, were hardly a climate in which an intricate problem such as pretribulationism versus posttribulationism could be solved.

The early church was far from settled on details of Eschatology though definitely premillennial. It was actually impossible for the tribulation question even to be discussed intelligently until the Protestant Reformation had restored a theological foundation which would support it. Unfortunately the Reformers went back to Augustine for the Eschatology instead of the early chiliastic Fathers, and until premillennialism was again established in the post-Reformation period the advance in the interpretation of prophecy had to wait. In a word, the early Fathers were neither pretribulationist nor posttribulationist in the modern meaning of the term. They simply had not raised the questions which are involved in this controversy.

Henry C. Thiessen has given a good summary of the testimony of the early church on this question: "Let us first note that, according to Moffat, 'Rabbinic piety (*Sanh.* 98b) expected exemption from the tribulation of the latter days only for those who were absorbed in good works and in sacred studies.' [Cf. possible allusion of Christ to this teaching, Luke 21:36.] Thus there was a Jewish background for the expectation that some men would not pass through the Tribulation. When we come to the early Fathers we find an almost total silence as to the Tribulation period. They abundantly testify to the fact of tribulations, but they say little about the future period called by preeminence The Tribulation. This fact should cause us no perplexity. These writers lived during the second and third centuries, and we all know that those were the centuries of the great Roman persecutions. The Church was passing through sore trials, and it did not much concern itself with the question of Tribulation yet to come. Perhaps it did not understand the exact nature of the period."⁷⁸

It may, therefore, be concluded that while the early church did not teach twentieth-century pretribulationism, neither did it teach modern posttribulationism. It is therefore

⁷⁸ Henry C. Thiessen, "Will the Church Pass Through the Tribulation?" *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 92:189–90, April-June, 1935.

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a problem which must be settled on exegesis of the Scriptures rather than by polling the early Fathers.

Argument from the nature of the tribulation. Much of the controversy of the tribulation issue arises from a failure to agree on the definition of the tribulation itself. Among posttribulationists there is utter confusion on this point, some insisting the entire present age is the tribulation; others, like pretribulationists, regarding it as a future period. Obviously there can be no objective discussion concerning the church going through the tribulation until there is some agreement on basic terms.

Pretribulationists would agree with posttribulationists that the church has always had a measure of trial and tribulation. This is mentioned too often in Scripture to leave any room for argument (Matt 13:21; John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Rom 2:9; Rev 2:10). It is summed up in the words of Christ, “In the world ye shall have tribulation” (John 16:33). Many posttribulationists, however, agree with pretribulationists in holding that the great tribulation of which Christ spoke (Matt 24:21) is to be distinguished from this general experience of trial. The great tribulation, then, is a future period, properly identified with the last three and one-half years preceding the coming of Christ to establish His kingdom on earth. If so, the fact that the church is already in many trials is quite beside the point in determining whether it goes through the future period.

McPherson, a posttribulationist, rightly begins his discussion of posttribulational arguments by treating the definition of the tribulation itself. He finds that out of fifty-five occurrences of the verb *thlibo* and the noun *thlipsis* only three refer specifically to the great tribulation.⁷⁹ He therefore concludes that, while most of the passages refer to the present age, the three mentioned refer specifically to a future period.

The minority of posttribulationists who want to settle the whole question on the basis of Scriptures referring to present trials seem to be influenced by the desire to make pretribulationism ridiculous. The arguments of Fromow and Rose to this point, referred to previously, are of this character. In taking this line of argument, however, they do not face the evident fact that a period of trouble cannot be unprecedented and at the same time general throughout the age. The time of trouble referred to by Christ as the “great tribulation” was to have such a specific character as to make it a sign of the approaching second advent. The tendency of posttribulationism to blur the Scriptural description of the tribulation arises from the necessity to defend posttribulationism from certain contradictions. One of these is the question as to why saints of the present age who are perfectly justified by faith, given a perfect position of sanctification, and declared to be in Christ, should have to suffer the “great day of his wrath” in the tribulation. While

⁷⁹ McPherson, *op. cit.*, 13.

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Christians can be disciplined and chastened, they cannot justly be exposed to the wrath of God.

This apparent difficulty within posttribulationism is handled in various ways, but usually by distinguishing as Rose does, the time of trouble from the “great day of wrath.”⁸⁰ Their thought is that Christians in the future time of trouble will experience persecution and trial but not wrath.

Harold J. Ockenga in defending posttribulationism makes the same distinction: “The church will endure the wrath of men, but will not suffer the wrath of God.... This distinction which has been of great help to me is generally overlooked by pretribulation dispensationalists.... Pretribulation rapturists identify the tribulation with the wrath of God. If this can be proved, we must believe that the church will be taken out of the world before the tribulation, for there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.”⁸¹

The answer to this argument is found in the study of the passages describing the tribulation. No doubt, there will be special judgments which will fall only upon the unsaved. In Revelation 9, for instance, distinction is made between saved and unsaved in the judgment which falls upon the earth. In Revelation 7, a company of 144,000 are sealed from the twelve tribes of Israel and are apparently protected. On the other hand, many of the judgments by their very nature cannot distinguish saved from unsaved. The judgments of famine and the sword, or earthquakes and stars falling from heaven, war and pestilence, are not by their nature suitable for discriminatory judgment. They would fall upon just and unjust alike.

The principal difficulty of this posttribulation argument lies not in the question of whether the church will experience wrath as such but rather whether it will enter the day of wrath, i.e., the time period in which wrath will be poured out. In 1 Thessalonians 5:5, Christians are assured that they are “children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.” The context is dealing with a time period, “the day of the Lord.” In this connection again, it is stated, “For God hath not appointed us to wrath” (1 Thess 5:9). The church of Philadelphia was promised: “I will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth” (Rev 3:10). They were promised deliverance from the *period* of future trouble. Christ in Luke 21:36 exhorts them: “Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.” The only way one could escape “all these things” mentioned in the context—the

⁸⁰ Rose, *op. cit.*, 76-77.

⁸¹ Harold J. Ockenga, “Will the Church Go Through the Tribulation? Yes.” *Christian Life*, February 1955, 22.

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events preceding the return of Christ in glory—would be to escape the *period* in which they occurred by being in a different place, i.e., being “before the Son of man,” who immediately before the second advent would be in glory. While therefore there may be a difference in the purpose of trial for the Christian and judgment upon the wicked, there is no justification for believing that the horrors of the great tribulation will thereby be relieved for those who believe in Christ in that day. Instead, they will have persecution and martyrdom in addition to the natural catastrophes which characterize that hour.

Speaking in general, therefore, the posttribulationist argument is that Christians, while being sorely tried, will escape the judgments of the tribulation. The pretribulationist, while conceding there may be some difference in divine dealing with saved and unsaved in the period, believes that it will afford little relief for the saint in that day. It will give little comfort for Christians anticipating the future that there is this nominal difference in divine dealings with saved and unsaved in the tribulation.

Argument from the nature of the church. One of the major differences which separate posttribulationists from pretribulationists is disagreement on the nature of the church. Posttribulationists tend to include the saints of all ages in the church. Scripture clearly indicates that there will be saints in the great tribulation period. If all saints are in the church, then the church would necessarily go through the tribulation. Many pretribulationists, however, believe that the word *church*, when used of the body of Christ—the whole of the saved in the present age—is limited in Scripture to saints of the present age. Old Testament saints and those who are saved in the tribulation and millennium are distinct from the church according to this view. This difference in definition is crucial in the question of whether the church will go through the tribulation because the word *ecclesia* (church) is never used in a tribulation passage. Only by identifying the saints of the tribulation with the church can posttribulationists offer any positive proof of the presence of the church.

Typical of the posttribulationist position is Fromow’s statement: “A full survey of O.T. mentions of ‘the Saints’ or ‘Gracious Ones’ and of the ‘Assembly’ or ‘Great Congregation,’ terms employed throughout the Psalms and Prophecies of the O.T. would dispel the notion that the redeemed people of God of this age, or the Church, are not to be found in O.T. record and prophecy. We and they are members of the *same* body.”⁸² Fromow goes on to identify the term “elect” as another synonym.⁸³

McPherson presents the same argument in connection with the elect of Matthew 24:22. He writes: “There is nothing here to indicate who the elect are, although there is every

⁸² Fromow, *op. cit.*, 6.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 7.

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likelihood the term refers to the Church, inasmuch as of the fifteen other occurrences of the word *elect* in the New Testament, one refers to Christ, another to certain angels, and there is no sound reason for supposing the other thirteen do not refer to the Church, or individual members of the Church.”⁸⁴

The answer to the posttribulational definition of the church was discussed at length in connection with the relation of premillennialism to the church, and it need not be repeated here. It was pointed out then that while the word *ecclesia*, translated *church*, is found frequently in the Old Testament Septuagint translation and also in the New Testament to refer to various *congregations* assembled geographically, the word is never used in the sense of the corporate body of the saved except in this dispensation. Further, the word does not occur at all in the tribulation passages. These arguments are frequently brushed aside without an attempt to answer them by posttribulationists as witnessed in the quotations just given from Fromow and McPherson.

The highly significant fact stands without refutation from any posttribulationist that the *ecclesia*, the church as the body of Christ, is never mentioned as being in the tribulation in the major passages such as Revelation 4–19, Matthew 24–25, and is not found in any other tribulation context. The burden of proof is not on the pretribulationists. If the church is in the tribulation, why do not the posttribulationists cite texts where *ecclesia* is used in the translation in reference to a saved company? While an argument from silence is never final in itself, the whole point of posttribulationism would be conclusively won by just one reference placing the church in the tribulation.

Posttribulationists are wont to ask triumphantly, as does Orson P. Jones, “Did Jesus warn us to expect him BEFORE THE TRIBULATION? Did any apostle pen a line to the effect that Jesus will come BEFORE THE TRIBULATION? Chapter and verse! Please! If not a verse can be found stating that Jesus will come before the tribulation, why is it so widely taught? and seldom questioned?”⁸⁵ Jones goes on to point out that the Bible teaches that Christ will come after the tribulation. Pretribulationists all teach that Christ will return to the earth after the tribulation—this is not disputed. This fact does not settle the question of when the translation will take place. This sort of illogic advanced by Jones only adds to the confusion and proves nothing. If one were ready to reply in kind, one could ask: “Where in the Bible is the translation of the church stated to be after the tribulation?” “Where does it say that the *ecclesia* is in the tribulation?” “Chapter and verse, please!” The fact is that neither posttribulationism nor pretribulationism is an explicit teaching of Scripture. The Bible does not in so many words state either. Pretribulationism is based on the fact that it allows a harmony of the Scriptures relating to the second advent. The

⁸⁴ McPherson, *op. cit.*, 8.

⁸⁵ Orson P. Jones, “Plain Speaking on the Rapture Question.” Unpublished tract.

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separation of the translation from the return of Christ to earth permits each of the two events, so different in character, to have its own place. It solves the problem of the confusing and contradictory details in the posttribulation interpretation illustrated in the difficulty of the posttribulationists themselves to work out a harmony of prophecies related to the second advent.

The doctrine of the church is, then, determined in the question of whether the church will go through the tribulation. All agree that saints will be found in the tribulation. Pretribulationism necessarily requires a distinction between these saints and the saints of the present age forming the church. This difference of opinion has seldom had a fair handling from posttribulationists who usually adopt a “Tut, tut, of course the church includes all saints” attitude. The pretribulationist position is dismissed as “dispensational,” as if that was the coup de grace of pretribulationism. Not only is pretribulationism dependent upon an ecclesiology which recognizes the unique place of the church of the present age, but it is also true that premillennialism logically stems from distinguishing Israel and the church much on the same theological basis. Agreement must be reached first on the pertinence of Ecclesiology to Eschatology before any significant debate can be held on the relative merits of posttribulationism versus pretribulationism.⁸⁶

Posttribulationism (continued)

Denial of imminency of the return of Christ. The teaching that Christ could come for His church at any moment is a doctrine of pretribulationism often singled out for attack by posttribulationists. Obviously, if the church must go through the tribulation, the imminent translation is a vain hope. Posttribulationists therefore labor either to deny imminency or to invest the word with a different meaning which does not require immediacy. Their denial of imminence is a major aspect of their argument against pretribulationism.

Posttribulationists are wont to give considerable space to this argument—more than can be allowed in rebuttal.⁸⁷ The following arguments are usually included in the posttribulationist statement: (1) the promise of Christ to Peter that he would die in old age (John 21:18–19); (2) various parables which teach a long interval between the time the

⁸⁶ *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 1998 (electronic edition). Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 112:448, October-December 1955, 289-303.

⁸⁷ Cf. Robert Cameron, *Scriptural Truth about the Lord's Return*, 21-69.

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Lord leaves and the time He returns (Matt 25:14–30); (3) intimations that the program for the present age is extensive (Matt 13:1–50; 28:19–20; Luke 19:11–27; Acts 1:5–8); (4) Paul’s long-distance plans for missionary journeys and his knowledge of his approaching death, a tacit denial that he believed in the imminent return of Christ; (5) the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, preceding the second advent (Luke 21:20–24); (6) the specific signs of the second advent given to the disciples (Matt 24:1–25:30). The problem is further complicated for the pretribulationist in that nineteen hundred years have elapsed, indicating that it was, after all, the purpose of God to have an extensive period before the coming of the Lord. How then can these objections be answered?

At the outset it must be observed that most of the hindrances to the coming of the Lord at any moment in the first century no longer exist. A long period has elapsed; Peter and Paul have gone home to the Lord; only the specific signs of Matthew 24–25 remain to be fulfilled. Most of the difficulties to an imminent return have been resolved.

However, the question is whether the first-century Christians believed and taught the imminent return of Christ in the sense that it could occur at any moment. Most of the difficulties raised by posttribulationists dissolve upon examination. Peter was middle-aged at the time the prophecy of John 21:18–19 was given. By the time the teaching of the imminent translation of the church was fully preached and received in the church he was already well past middle life. The prophecy as recorded in John 21 apparently was not common property of the church until long after he died anyway and constituted no obstacle to belief in the imminency of the Lord’s coming for the great majority of Christians. Even if known, the dangers of martyrdom as illustrated in the early sudden death of James and the difficulties of communication would leave most of the church with no knowledge on a given day whether Peter was alive or not.

The long period pictured by the parables could certainly be fitted into the doctrine of imminency. A long period for a journey might occupy only a few years, as far as the first-century Christians could determine. The extensive preaching of the gospel in the first century might likewise seem to satisfy the program of preaching to the ends of the earth. The coming of the Lord was in no wise contingent upon the gospel actually reaching every person. Under the pretribulationist interpretation, time is allowed for events to be fulfilled after the translation of the church. While the destruction of Jerusalem took place in A.D. 70, as far as first-century Christians could see it might have been delayed until after the rapture. In any case, the specific signs of the second advent could follow the translation. That Paul should receive specific revelation immediately before his death that he would die rather than be translated may have removed the imminency of the Lord’s return for him in his last days but no more.

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As has been shown in previous discussion of the doctrine of imminency in connection with pretribulation arguments, the positive fact remains that Scripture abounds with exhortation to be looking for the return of the Lord. These positive commands, which are meaningful largely as related to imminency, are evidence far outweighing the difficulties raised against the doctrine. The return of the Lord if imminent justifies such descriptive words as *blessed*, *comfort*, *purifying*, and the like. If the posttribulationists are right, the hope of the Lord's return is reduced to the hope of resurrection, as few of the saints who would enter the tribulation would escape martyrdom.

Argument that the resurrection of the saints occurs after the tribulation. Alexander Reese in his major work attacking pretribulationism uses as his principal argument the resurrection of the saints as an event which follows the tribulation.⁸⁸ Reese points out that Darby believed that the resurrection of the Old Testament saints took place at the same time as the translation and resurrection of the church. Therefore, if it can be proved that the Old Testament saints are raised *after* the tribulation it would also prove that the church is translated at the same time. Reese states: "Now concerning the Rapture there are only three undisputed texts in the Bible that deal with it, namely: 1 Thess iv.17, 2 Thess ii.1, and John xiv.3; but there are many passages in both the O. and N. Testaments that speak of the resurrection of the holy dead, which, Darbyists assure us, takes place in immediate connexion with the Rapture."⁸⁹ Reese then proceeds to pile up proofs that the resurrection of the Old Testament saints occurs after the tribulation period.

While many pretribulationists have attempted to refute Reese on this point, there is a growing tendency to review the question of whether the Old Testament saints are, after all, raised at the same time as the church. Most of the old Testament passages of which Daniel 12:1–2 is an example do indeed seem to set up a chronology of tribulation first, then resurrection of the Old Testament saints. On the other hand, the passages dealing with the resurrection of the church in the New Testament seem to include only the church. The expression "the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thess 4:16) seems to include only the church. The Old Testament saints are never described by the phrase "in Christ." The fact that the "voice of the archangel"—Israel's defender—is heard at the rapture is not conclusive proof that Israel is raised at that time. The tendency of followers of Darby to spiritualize the resurrection of Daniel 12:1–2 as merely the restoration of Israel, thereby refuting its posttribulationism, is to forsake literal interpretation to gain a point, a rather costly concession for premillenarians who build upon literal interpretation of prophecy. The best answer to Reese is to concede his point that the resurrection of Old Testament saints is after the tribulation, but to divorce it completely from the translation

⁸⁸ Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, 34-94.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

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and resurrection of the church. Reese's carefully built argument then proves only that Darby was hasty in claiming the resurrection of the Old Testament saints at the time of the translation of the church. If the translation of the church is a different event entirely, Reese proves nothing by his argument.

The point at issue is the question when the translation and resurrection of the church will take place. There is not a single Scripture in either the Old or New Testament which relates the translation of the church to a posttribulational coming of Christ. While Old Testament saints may be resurrected at Christ's posttribulational coming, no mention is made of a translation of living saints. The reason that posttribulationists attempt to throw the burden of proof for a pretribulational rapture on their opponents is that they themselves have no proof to the contrary. The fact that Old Testament saints and tribulational saints are resurrected after the tribulation according to explicit Scriptures (Dan 12:1–2; Rev 20:4) raises the question why neither the translation nor the resurrection of the church is mentioned in this event. While silence is not explicit, it is nevertheless eloquent in this case. If posttribulationists had one positive Scripture on the time of the translation, it would save them much complicated argument.

Argument that the principal words for the return of Christ refer to a posttribulational coming. Both pretribulationists and posttribulationists have been guilty of confusing the real issue by injecting technical meaning for certain words referring to the return of Christ. The principal words cited are parousia, usually translated "coming"; apokalupsis, translated "revelation," and epiphaneia, translated "appearing."

Posttribulationists have rightly argued that all three of these terms are used in connection with the return of Christ after the tribulation. The error lies in the attempt to make these words technical expressions referring to the second advent. A simple concordance study will demonstrate that these are general rather than specific terms and that all three of them are used of the coming of Christ at the translation and also of His coming at the second advent. Their common use no more proves that the two events are one and the same than the use of any other ordinary word.⁹⁰

The "coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus," Paul's friends (1 Cor 16:17), "the coming of Titus" (2 Cor 7:6–7), the "coming" of Paul himself (Phil 1:26, A.V., R.S.V.), the "coming" of the lawless one (2 Thess 2:9), and "the coming of the day of God" (2 Pet 3:12) are certainly not one and the same "coming." The use of parousia in these passages proves it is not a technical word. The same word is used of the coming of the Lord at the translation (1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1; James 5:7–8; 1 John 2:28).

⁹⁰ Cf. John F. Walvoord, "New Testament Words for the Lord's Coming," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 101:283–89, July-September, 1944.

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Some pretribulationists have erred in claiming the word *parousia* as a technical word referring to the rapture. That this is not correct is shown by its usage in passages referring to the coming of Christ after the tribulation (Matt 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 2:8; 2 Pet 1:16).

The other words, *αποκαλυψις* and *επισηανεια*, translated “revelation” and “appearing,” are likewise used of both events. *Αποκαλυψις* is used of the revelation of Christ to the church at the rapture in a number of passages (1 Cor 1:7; Col 3:4; 1 Pet 1:7, 13). The church will “see him even as he is” (1 John 3:2). The world will see the glorified Christ when He returns after the tribulation (Luke 17:30; 2 Thess 1:7; 1 Pet 4:13).

Επισηανεια refers to the appearing of Christ. It is used of the incarnation of the Son of God (Luke 1:79; 2 Tim 1:10). As related to the translation of the church, it is used in 1 Timothy 6:14 and 2 Timothy 4:8. As relating to the coming of Christ after the tribulation, reference is found in 2 Timothy 4:1 and Titus 2:13.

The posttribulation argument on these words proves only that the three words are used of both events. It does not prove that both comings are one and the same, and it is therefore worthless as a refutation of pretribulationism. While posttribulationists often ridicule the teaching that there should be more than one “coming” of Christ, there is no more reason why there should not be more than one future coming than there is against their own doctrine of a past coming and a future coming. To the Old Testament saint the division into one coming for suffering and another for glory and judgment was equally difficult to comprehend.

Argument from the parable of the wheat and the tares. Posttribulationists use the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matthew 13 both because of its general and its specific teaching. The parable, describing as it does the course of the present interadvent age, implies by its description of the growth of the wheat and the tares that a considerable time period must elapse. McPherson uses this phase of the parable to refute the doctrine of imminency: “Here again we find the implication of a very considerable passage of time.”⁹¹

Reese devotes an entire chapter to the subject, dealing mostly with details of the parable. He dwells on the statement that the tares are gathered out “first,” just the opposite of what occurs at the rapture as the pretribulationists regard it: “But if anything was lacking to refute Darbyists’ explanation of the parable, it is found in their treatment of the burning of the tares. The wording of the parable, ‘Gather ye together *first* the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn’ (v. 30), and the words of the Lord’s interpretation (vv. 41–3), that the professors are gathered for judgment at the same

⁹¹ Norman S. McPherson, *Triumph Through Tribulation*, 48.

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crisis as the transfiguration of the righteous, naturally caused great embarrassment to men who separated them by several years.”⁹²

It is undoubtedly true that pretribulationists are partly to blame for the confusion on this point in their identification of the harvest as the rapture. The *terminus ad quem* in Matthew 13 is not the rapture at all, in the opinion of the writer. The period in view is the entire interadvent age—the period in, which the kingdom in mystery form would be on the earth, the entire time between the first and second advent of Christ. The church age as such is included, but the period in view in Matthew 13 begins with the first advent and extends to the second and is a longer period, having different termini than the church age. The point is that the translation and resurrection of the church is not the subject of this passage at all. If this suggested interpretation be adopted, it surplants the rather inadequate explanation of pretribulationists who try to harmonize the end of the age in Matthew 13 with the end of the church age.

However, Reese completely overlooks that his argument on the tares being gathered first is also a refutation of posttribulationism. According to the posttribulationist position as set forth by Rose and many others, the translation for them also precedes rather than follows the judgment on the wicked. In Matthew 13 itself, under the parable of the good and bad fish, the “good” fish are gathered in “vessels” first and then the bad fish thrown away (Matt 13:48). Any argument on the order of events based on this passage creates as many problems for the posttribulationist as for the pretribulationist. The best answer is that the passage is dealing with the fact of separation, not the order of it; the division has to do with saints living at the end of the age, not saints who lived and died during the age, nor the church raptured before the age closes. The kingdom in mystery form existing during the entire period between the two advents of Christ does not end with the rapture of the body of Christ. Professing Christendom, a large aspect of the kingdom of heaven, goes right on without interruption. Saints who believe in the tribulation period are included in the kingdom. The precise terminology of the passage should be respected. The parable of the wheat and tares along with other similar parables has no definite bearing on the question of whether the church will go through the tribulation.

Argument from the Day of the Lord. There are few prophetic subjects about which there is more confusion than the theme of the Day of the Lord. The older pretribulationists such as Darby and the Brethren writers in general identified the Day of the Lord with the millennium and placed its beginning at the return of Christ to establish His earthly kingdom, an interpretation later popularized by the *Scotfield Reference Bible*.⁹³ Under this viewpoint, the Day of the Lord begins *after* the tribulation. Brethren writers were

⁹² Reese, *op. cit.*, 98.

⁹³ *Scotfield Reference Bible*, note, 1272.

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therefore hard pressed to explain how the Day of the Lord could be an event which came like “a thief in the night” (1 Thess 5:2), i.e., unexpectedly and unannounced, as it would be preceded by such events as the great tribulation and other notable signs. Further, it jeopardized their teaching that the translation of the church was uniquely an event unheralded and imminent. Such passages as 1 Thessalonians 5, discussing the Day of the Lord, seemed to be connected with the translation of the church in the preceding verses (1 Thess 4:13–18). Post-tribulationists were not slow to take advantage of this area of confusion to drive home their own arguments. Reese, for instance, devotes a whole chapter to the subject in which he capitalizes on this apparent weakness.⁹⁴

The argument of Reese, while quite detailed, is summed up in this: that *all* references to “the Day” in Scripture refer to the Day of the Lord.⁹⁵ Proceeding upon this sweeping generalization, he demonstrates that the translation of the church, the judgment of the saints, and the coming of the Day of the Lord occur at the same time—on “the Day.” In doing this he argues that the following Scriptural expressions are one and the same: “the day” (1 Thess 5:4; 1 Cor 3:13; Rom 13:11–12); “in that day” (2 Thess 1:10; 2 Tim 1:18; 4:18); “Messiah’s day” or “day of Christ” (Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16); “the day of our Lord Jesus Messiah” (1 Cor 1:7–8; 2 Cor 1:14); “the day of the Lord” (1 Cor 5:4–5; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:1–3).

To the unwary reader, his argument seems quite cogent. To those who analyze his argument, it will be apparent that he is guilty of begging the question. The only way that these various expressions occurring in different contexts could be made identical would be to assume first that the posttribulationists are right—the very point he is attempting to prove. The contexts of the various passages give no justification whatever for malting the word *day* a technical word meaning in every instance the day of the second advent. Far more reasonable is the approach which takes every instance according to its context, recognizing that the word *day* is a general word made specific only by the context in which it occurs. The “day” in view, accordingly, is the day pictured by each passage—in some instances an event occurring in a specific period compared to a twenty-four hour day, as in the day of judgment of Christians (1 Cor 3:13; 2 Tim 4:8). In other instances it is the Day of the Lord, a period including the entire millennial reign of Christ.

The problem left unsolved by the early pretribulationists in their discussion of the Day of the Lord has, however, a very simple solution which at one stroke lays to rest the wordy arguments of posttribulationists on this phase of the subject. The Day of the Lord as presented in the Old and New Testament *includes* rather than follows the tremendous events of the tribulation period. There seems some evidence that the Day of the Lord begins at once at the time of the translation of the church (cf. 1 Thess 5:1–9). The same

⁹⁴ Reese, *op. cit.*, 167-83.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

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event which translates the church begins the Day of the Lord. The events of the Day of the Lord begin thereafter to unfold: first the preparatory period, the first half of Daniel's last seven years of Israel's program preceding the second advent—the revelation of the man of sin, the formation of the revived Roman empire, finally reaching the stage of worldwide government, possibly as the last half of the period begins. Then there is the outpouring of judgments from on high, the seals of Revelation are broken, the trumpets of judgment sound, and the bowls of the wrath of God are poured out. The climactic event is the second coming of Christ to establish His kingdom, and the millennial age continuing the Day of the Lord is brought into being. In a word, the Day of the Lord begins *before* the tribulation time. When the day of grace ends with the translation of the church, the Day of the Lord begins at once. This interpretation gives a cogent explanation of the multiplied Scriptures which relate the Day of the Lord to the tribulation period and at the same time solves all the problems raised by the posttribulationist view of the Day of the Lord.

Argument from the Restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2. Pretribulationists frequently use the chronology of 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 as evidence for the pretribulationist translation of the church.⁹⁶ In refutation, some posttribulationists teach that the passage denies an imminent return of Christ by its declaration that two signs must be fulfilled first, namely, the rise of apostasy and the appearance of the man of sin. McPherson asks, "...why should Paul be so greatly concerned that no man deceive the Church concerning an event that allegedly has nothing to do with the Church?"⁹⁷ The answer to this question is not difficult to find. The Thessalonians evidently had received the erroneous suggestion that they were already in the Day of the Lord and that their present persecutions were those anticipated for this period. Paul's answer is, in effect, that they are not in this period because it could not even begin before the two events mentioned were fulfilled. While no doubt apostasy had already begun, the man of sin had not been revealed. The cogency of Paul's argument should be immediately apparent. He was demonstrating that the predicted Day of the Lord was still future. The passage is no comfort at all to posttribulationists, however, even though they deny the pretribulationist interpretation of it. Some posttribulationists concede that the restrainer is the Holy Spirit.⁹⁸ If so, the inference is obvious that the church must be translated first before the Day of the Lord and time of fearful persecution begin. Whatever bearing the passage has on the argument, its evidence is for pretribulationism. Even if the restrainer is not the Holy Spirit, the passage has no support for posttribulationism.

⁹⁶ Cf. previous discussion under Pretribulationism of the "Argument from the nature of the work of the Holy Spirit in this age," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, January-March, 1955, 6-10.

⁹⁷ McPherson, *op. cit.*, 56.

⁹⁸ Cf. John J. Scruby, *The Great Tribulation: The Church's Supreme Test*, 194.

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Argument from the doctrine of the end. Reese in his argument for the posttribulation position cites the doctrine of the end as evidence.⁹⁹ His argument is that the term *the end* is always used in Scripture for the end of the age, viz., the second coming of Christ to the earth. He claims to have agreement of the early Brethren writers on this score. As the term is used of the church, his claim is that this proves that the hope of the church is not translation before the tribulation but deliverance at its end. Reese cites five texts in support of his argument (1 Cor 1:7–8; Heb 3:6, 14; 6:11; Rev 2:26). After claiming the Brethren concede his position and agree with him, Reese then chides them for saying nothing at all on most of these passages – which it would seem would contradict his claim of their agreement.

The answer to Reese is quite simple. The end in view in each passage has to be determined by the context. Not one of the five texts cited can be positively linked with the post-tribulation coming of the Lord. Only one mentions the coming of Christ at all (1 Cor 1:7–8) and this could be the rapture. In other words, once again the argument depends upon a hasty and unsupported generalization. Like all other common words, the context must determine what is meant by “the end,” and the verses cited present no difficulty at all for the pretribulationist.

Argument from the doctrine of the rapture itself. While usually posttribulationists do not appeal to the doctrine of the rapture itself for support of their position, Reese cites several instances where he believes positive teaching of Scripture places the rapture after the tribulation. One passage offered is Matthew 24:31: “And he shall send forth 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.”

Reese’s argument is as follows: “In His discourses the Lord shows us the Elect being won for Him through the world-wide preaching of the gospel (Matt xxii.14); shows the Elect in the very midst of the trial (xxiv. *passim*); describes the trial itself; portrays the Elect as a poor widow, crying in her distress to the Righteous Judge to hasten His Coming, and remember her in her affliction; shows us that, when the very Elect seem undone, when all seem weak and liable to be deceived by the terrible delusions of the End-time, He can stand it no longer; He shortens the days of her affliction; He arises in His pity, His majesty, His power and rescues His Elect by gathering them to Himself (Matt xxiv.21–31, 40–1)... The assertion of Kelly in his *Second Coming* (p. 211) that there is no rapture at Matt xxiv.31, is as bold as it is unfounded. Our Lord in that passage gave a perfect picture of the assembling of the saved of this Dispensation by means of a rapture; St. Mark even

⁹⁹ Reese, *op. cit.*, 120-24.

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used for 'gather' the verbal form of the same word used for 'gathering' in 2 Thess ii.1, where Paul refers to the Rapture."¹⁰⁰

The answer to Reese is simply that the fulfillment of Matthew 24:31 does not hinder one iota the fulfillment of the pretribulation rapture. While even pretribulationists have differed on the reference to the "elect," any of several explanations would suffice to harmonize with the pretribulation position. The "elect" could be all the elect—the elect of all ages, living, resurrected or translated. Obviously, there is going to be a great confluence of all the elect at the beginning of the millennium—all views agree on this. Some have taken it to refer to the elect of Israel—they also will be gathered whether in heaven or in earth. The point is that such a gathering does not preclude a previous translation of the church any more than the translation of Enoch and Elijah would thereby make this gathering impossible. The great weakness in Reese's argument is that it does not prove his point. There is no translation mentioned at all; nor is there any resurrection in this passage. All that is stated is that the elect are gathered. As proof for a posttribulation translation, the passage is worthless. The view of Kelly that there is no rapture here, described by Reese "as bold as it is unfounded,"¹⁰¹ is true to the text of Scripture. It is Reese who is reading into the passage more than it says.

Another passage cited by Reese in support of a posttribulation rapture is Matthew 24:40–41. This passage also has not always had uniform treatment from pretribulationists, but Reese is correct in taking the pretribulation point of view as holding that the one who is taken is taken in judgment rather than in translation: "Then shall two men be in the field; one is taken, and one is left: two women shall be grinding at the mill; one is taken, and one is left" (Matt 24:40–41). On this Reese comments: "Of course Darbyists have a shift to get rid of these damaging facts: they interpret the Rapture in Matt xxiv.41, and Luke xvii.34–5, as a seizure to *judgment*; the leaving as a leaving for blessing, in the kingly rule of the Son of man. Darby, in one of the few instances where he allowed private views to influence (and mar) his admirable, literal translation, translated *paralambano* in Luke xvii.34–5, by *seize*. The use of this word in the N.T. is absolutely opposed to this; it is a good word; a word used exclusively in the sense of 'take away with' or 'receive,' or 'take home.'"¹⁰² Reese goes on to illustrate the usage in John 14:3, where it is used of the rapture. Once again, however, Reese is guilty of a hasty generalization which a simple concordance study would have eliminated. The truth is that *paralambano* means only "to take with."¹⁰³ The word does not in itself indicate whether the action is good or bad. The generalization that it is always used in a good sense is shattered, however, by the use of

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 207-8.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 214-15.

¹⁰³ *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 484.

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the word in John 19:6 where it refers to Jesus being taken to the cross by the soldiers. Reese's objection to the pretribulationist interpretation of this passage falls with his unsustainable generalization. Matthew 24:40–41 simply states that one is taken away. The fact that those taken away are judged and those who remain enter the kingdom is taught explicitly in the context (Matt 25:31–46). The pretribulationist interpretation is therefore more in keeping with the usual premillennial interpretation of events at the beginning of the millennium.

Summary. It is not necessary to recapitulate the dozen common posttribulation arguments considered and their refutation. Suffice it to say that pretribulationists have an adequate answer for each posttribulation contention. Most important is the fact that posttribulationists have not a single Scripture passage where the church as the body of Christ is found in the events of the tribulation time preceding the second coming. The precise teaching of the translation of the church is never found in passages dealing with the return of Christ to establish His kingdom on earth. It has been shown that the arguments for posttribulationism depend upon identification of the church with tribulation saints—which they assume but never are able to demonstrate. Frequently their whole argument is based on confusing the great tribulation still future with the common trials of the saints throughout the age. An examination of the posttribulationist arguments most commonly advanced has revealed no need of retreating one step from the blessed hope of the imminent return of Christ for His own.¹⁰⁴

Midtribulationism

Definition of the Theory

Midtribulationism is a comparatively new interpretation of Scripture relating to the translation of the church. Its principal expositor is Norman B. Harrison. Accepting some of the basic premises of pretribulationism, such as the future character of the seventieth week of Daniel (Dan 9:27), midtribulationism places the translation of the church at the middle of this week instead of at its beginning as do the pretribulationists. In contrast to the posttribulationists, it holds that the translation takes place before the time of wrath and great tribulation instead of after it.

Midtribulationism is, therefore, a mediate view between posttribulationism and pretribulationism. As such it has commended itself to some who for one reason or

¹⁰⁴ *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 1998 (electronic edition). Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 113:449, January-March 1956, 1-15.

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another are dissatisfied with both pretribulationism and posttribulationism. It has also provided a place for certain prophecies to be fulfilled before the translation of the church instead of afterward, and at the same time is able to claim the promises of comfort and blessing which seem to be denied by the posttribulationists who take the church through the entire period.

Midtribulationists usually do not use the term of themselves, and prefer to classify themselves as pretribulationists—pretribulational in the sense that Christ is coming before the “great tribulation” which characterizes the last half of Daniel’s seventieth week. Harrison refers to his view as teaching “His pre-Tribulation coming.”¹⁰⁵ The term *midtribulation* is justified by the common designation of the entire seventieth week of Daniel as a period of tribulation even though pretribulationists can agree that only its latter half is properly “the great tribulation.”

Important Issues

The midtribulational interpretation bristles with important theological, exegetical, and practical problems, and it differs radically from normal pretribulationism. Among the crucial issues are such questions as the following: (1) Does the seventh trumpet of Revelation mark the beginning of the great tribulation? (2) Is the rapture of the church in Revelation 11? (3) Is the seventh trumpet the “last trumpet” for the church? (4) Do the programs for Israel and the church overlap? (5) Is the hope of the imminent return of Christ unscriptural? In general, the midtribulational view requires a different interpretation of most of the important Scriptures relating to the coming of Christ for the church.

Does the Seventh Trumpet of Revelation Begin the Great Tribulation?

One of the crucial issues in the midtribulational theory is the question of whether the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11 begins the great tribulation. In fact, it is not too much to say that the whole teaching of midtribulationists depends upon this identification. The midtribulational view cites many other Scriptures, however. Harrison appeals to the following passages: Exodus 25–40; Leviticus 23; Psalm 2; Daniel 2, 7, 9; Matthew 13; 24–25; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:10; 2 Thessalonians 2.¹⁰⁶ It is clear from reading his discussion, however, that these are supporting passages, or problems which have to be solved in the midtribulational view, rather than the crux of the issue.

¹⁰⁵ Norman B. Harrison, *The End*, 118.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

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The midtribulational view requires the interpretation that the first half of the Book of Revelation is not the great tribulation. In general, the theme song of its adherents is that the church will go through the “beginning of sorrows” (Matt 24:8, A.V.), or “beginning of travail” (A.S.V.), but not through the “great tribulation” (Matt 24:21) as Harrison indicates in his “Harmonized Outline” of Matthew 24–25 and Revelation 1–20.¹⁰⁷ It is their position that the events of the seven seals as well as the judgments of the first six trumpets are related to the first three and one-half years of Daniel’s seventieth week and therefore are not a description of the “great tribulation.”

Harrison states: “‘Wrath’ is a word reserved for the Great Tribulation—see ‘wrath of God’ in 14:10, 19; 15:7; 16:1, etc.”¹⁰⁸ He implies that there is no wrath of God mentioned during the period of the seven seals and the first six trumpets. In his comment on Revelation 11:18, he states: “The Day of Wrath has *only now come* (11:18). This means that nothing that precedes in the Seals and Trumpets can rightfully be regarded as wrath.”¹⁰⁹ He further defines the tribulation as equivalent to divine wrath: “Let us get clearly in mind the *nature of the Tribulation*, that it is divine ‘wrath’ (11:18; 14:8, 10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19) and divine ‘judgment’ (14:7; 15:4; 16:7; 17:1; 18:10; 19:2).”¹¹⁰ In both instances where Harrison gives extended lists of references to “wrath” in Revelation¹¹¹ he, with evident purpose, omits Revelation 6:16–17 and Revelation 7:14. The former passage refers to wrath in connection with the sixth seal, and the latter is the only reference to the “great tribulation” by that title in the entire book. Both of these passages fall in the section of Revelation which deals with the period preceding the trumpets.

The explanation given of the reference to “wrath” in Revelation 6:16–17 is certainly inadequate for such a crucial issue. Harrison interprets the sixth seal “as reaching to the day of Wrath,”¹¹² as if it were a future instead of aorist as it is in the text. No Greek tense would be more inappropriate to express this idea of Harrison’s than the aorist, which usually is punctiliar as to kind of action, and present or past as to time. If “the great day of their Wrath is come” (Rev 6:17), it certainly cannot be postponed as to its beginning until after the seventh seal is opened and seven trumpets of various judgments are poured out upon the earth.

Not only does Harrison exclude wrath, but the first three and one-half years are declared a relatively pleasant time. Harrison writes: “The first half of the week, or period of seven

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 91, 120.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 91.

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years, was a 'sweet' anticipation to John, as it is to them; under treaty protection, they [Israel] will be 'sitting pretty,' as we say. But the second half—'bitter' indeed...."¹¹³ Pretribulationists could accept the teaching that the first three and one-half years of Daniel's seventieth week is a time of protection for Israel, but they do not find this period described in Revelation 6–11.

Even a casual reading of the seals and first six trumpets will make clear that the great tribulation begins with the early seals, not with the seventh trumpet. Certainly famine (Rev 6:5–6), death for one-fourth of the world's population (Rev 6:8), earthquakes, stars falling from heaven, the moon becoming as blood, and every mountain and island being moved out of their places (Rev 6:12–14) portray indeed "the great day of their wrath" — the "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev 6:16–17). This is no period of "'sweet' anticipation to John,"¹¹⁴ but the unprecedented time of trouble. Add to this the first six trumpets with their bloodshed, destruction on the earth and the sea, and poisoning of the rivers with the result that "many men died" (Rev 8:11), climaxed by the great woes of Revelation 9–10, and one has a picture of great tribulation such as the world has never experienced. According to Scripture, at that time "their torment" will be "as the torment of a scorpion, when it striketh a man" (Rev 9:5). Some will seek death in vain in order to escape (Rev 9:10). In the sixth seal, one-third of the remaining earth's population will be killed. If language means anything, this is the predicted time of unprecedented trouble.

Midtribulationists are obliged not only to explain away the explicit reference to wrath in connection with the sixth seal (Rev 6:16–17), but they must also slide over the only specific reference to the "great tribulation" in the entire Book of Revelation (7:14). This is made into a prophetic vision of the time to follow the tribulation. In the light of these references to wrath and great tribulation in a context as frightfully graphic as the events of the seals and first six trumpets, it should be obvious that the very foundation of the midtribulation theory is built upon sand. Few theories are more openly contradicted by the very Scriptures from which support is expected.

The efforts to evade these graphic Scriptures force midtribulationists to spiritualize and thereby nullify the force of these judgments. Harrison attempts to find fulfillment of the trumpet judgments in the events of World War II. He states in reference to the second trumpet, "The 'great mountain burning with fire' seems a clear reference to Germany, suddenly 'cast into the sea' of nations...."¹¹⁵ In the same paragraph he then suddenly makes "the sea" a literal sea in which literal ships are sunk: "The further reference to 'sea'

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹¹⁴ *Loc. cit.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 218.

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and 'ships' (8:9) must betaken literally...."¹¹⁶ It should be obvious that this interpretation also calls for a chronology in which the seventh trumpet will sound within a few years thereafter, involving a date-setting for the rapture which subsequent history has proven an error.

The evident fallacy of the whole midtribulation interpretation of Revelation 1–11 is that this view forces a spiritualization of the entire passage to find contemporary rather than future fulfillment. In doing so, a strained exegesis of the passages is achieved which is subjective and arbitrary. Even a simple reading of this section will give an impression of vivid divine judgment upon a sinful world which transcends anything which history has recorded. If the passage is intended to be taken with any serious literalness, its fulfillment is yet future.

The great tribulation actually begins in Revelation 6, not in Revelation 11. The seventh trumpet marks a point near its end, not its beginning. Posttribulationists make the seventh trumpet the end of the tribulation.¹¹⁷ This is accomplished by ignoring the fact that the seven vials of judgment follow the seventh trump. It is curious, however, that both of these opponents of pretribulationism adopt such opposite views of the seventh trump, and, in effect, cancel out each other.

Is the Rapture of the Church in Revelation 11?

At no point does the midtribulation view manifest its dogmatism more than in the interpretation of Revelation 11. One midtribulationist contends for the view that the great tribulation is the first part of Daniel's seventieth week, that the rapture occurs in the middle of the week after this tribulation, and that the last half of the week is the beginning of the Day of the Lord. The rapture according to this view takes place at the sixth seal of Revelation 6:12–17.¹¹⁸ This point of view is actually a variation of posttribulationism and is peculiar to the author. The more normal position for midtribulationism is to place the rapture at Revelation 11.

J. Oliver Buswell has expressed the midtribulation position in the following statement: "I do not believe that the Church will go through any part of that period which the Scripture specifically designates as the wrath of God, but I do believe that the abomination of desolation will be a specific signal for a hasty flight followed by a very

¹¹⁶ *Loc. Cit.*

¹¹⁷ Cf. Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, 73.

¹¹⁸ Cf. H.W.H., *The Church and the Great Tribulation*, 46 pp.

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brief but a very terrible persecution, and that followed very quickly by the rapture of the Church *preceding* the outpouring of the vials of the wrath of God.”¹¹⁹

We are indebted to Norman B. Harrison for the most explicit exposition of this teaching. His interpretation of Revelation 11 claims that “all the elements involved in the Coming are here.”¹²⁰ He submits the following tabulation:

Rev 11:3	The Witnesses	Acts 1:8
11:4	The Spirit	Acts 1:8; 2 Thess 2:7
Moses-Elijah	The Two Classes	“Dead” – “Alive”
11:7–10	The Dead	1 Thess 4:13–14
11:11	The Resurrection	1 Thess 4:16
11:12	The Cloud	Acts 1:9–11; 1 Thess 4:17
11:12	The Great Voice	1 Thess 4:16
11:12	The Ascension	1 Thess 4:16–17
11:15	The Trumpet	1 Thess 4:16
11:15–17	The Kingdom Received	Luke 19:15
11:18	The Servants Rewarded	Luke 19:15–17
11:18	The Time of Wrath	Rev 3:10–11
11:19	The Temple in Heaven	1 Cor 3:16

This tabulation¹²¹ is supplemented by the discussion which brings out the midtribulational interpretation. The two witnesses are symbolic of Moses and Elijah,

¹¹⁹ Extract from letter published in *Our Hope*, LVI, June, 1950, 720.

¹²⁰ *Op. cit.*, 117.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

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“represent the Law and the Prophets” and more specifically according to their description in Revelation 11 as “two olive trees and two candlesticks” (Rev 11:4) they represent the witness of the saints of the Old and New Covenant.¹²² Harrison is not too clear as to his precise definition, and seems to waver between the idea that the two witnesses represent all the saints, especially Jew and Gentile, and the idea that they represent Moses and Elijah, viz., “The Two Classes ‘Dead’—‘Alive.’”¹²³ By this, apparently, he means that the two witnesses are the living church and the resurrected saints at the time of the rapture. He states, “Now, if the two witnesses are symbolic of a ‘larger company of witnesses,’ then their resurrection and ascension must be symbolic of the resurrection and rapture of that larger company.”¹²⁴

This interpretation is supplemented by further identification of “the cloud” as symbolic of the rapture: “‘The Cloud’ (11:12) is a definite reference to the Lord’s presence-parousia.”¹²⁵ Because the future tense is omitted in the description of Christ in Revelation 11:17, Harrison concludes, “It seeks to tell us: *He has come.*”¹²⁶ The reference to the “reign” of Christ is declared by Harrison to be future, not present, as the third woe, viz., the vials, must be first poured out.¹²⁷ The statement, “thy wrath came” (Rev 11:18, A.S.V.) is interpreted, on the basis of the Authorized translation, “thy wrath is come,” as “has *only now come* (11:18). This means that nothing that precedes in the Seals and Trumpets can rightfully be regarded as wrath.”¹²⁸ Harrison overlooks that the verb “came” is in the aorist which emphasizes the fact but not the time of the action. It could just as well refer to the whole course of the wrath of God in the seals and preceding trumpets.

His interpretation of the opening of the temple (Rev 11:19) is that it “is a further reference to the Rapture. ‘Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?’”¹²⁹ Just how the church can be “opened in heaven” he does not explain. The concluding identification is that the “seventh Trumpet sounds for the pouring of the Bowls of wrath. While it brings glory to the Church, it brings Woe (the third) to the world.”¹³⁰ The church goes through two woes which are not to be identified with the great tribulation, but not through the third woe which is so identified.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 114-15.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 116-17.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹²⁷ *Loc. cit.*

¹²⁸ *Loc. cit.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹³⁰ *Loc. cit.*

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The fallacy of this entire exegesis of the passage is that there is no positive evidence that any of the identifications are correct. Similarities do not prove identity. The character of the two witnesses seems to indicate that they are actual individuals, not representatives of all the saints living and dead. The saints as a whole do not perform the miracles nor the witness designated of them (Rev 11:5–6). Nor are all the saints, especially the resurrected saints, killed by the beast. If all the saints are killed, then none would be living to be raptured. If the witnesses are only symbols, how can symbols be literally killed and lie in literal streets? Do the saints as a whole have men look on their “dead bodies” for “three days and a half,” refusing them burial in a tomb (Rev 11:9)? The other identifications are just as strained and unsustainable by the text.

One of the major difficulties which the midtribulationists ignore is the chronology of the passage. The seventh trumpet sounds *after* the events portrayed in Revelation 11:3–14. Properly, they should hold that the rapture occurs with the sixth trumpet rather than the seventh, but this would upset their identification of the trumpet in Revelation 11 as the “last trumpet.” According to 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, the chronology is first the trumpet, then resurrection and translation. It should be clear to anyone not a midtribulationist that the identifications depend upon incidental similarities, not on express parallels. Actually, there is no translation of saints at all in this chapter. The nearest approach is the resurrection of the two witnesses who are best identified as actual personalities who will live and die as martyrs at that time.

Is the Seventh Trumpet the “Last Trumpet” for the Church?

The most important point in the entire midtribulationist argument is the identification of the “last trumpet” of 1 Corinthians 15:52 with the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11. It has already been pointed out that all the events which they connect with the seventh trumpet actually are related to the sixth trumpet instead of the seventh, which fact at the start makes the whole position untenable. However, if this argument be ignored for the time, the identification of the seventh and therefore last trumpet in Revelation 11 might seem to have some relevance to the last trumpet of 1 Corinthians. At least midtribulationists are quite sure of this point, and many posttribulationists hold the same view. They differ only as to the time of the seventh trumpet, the former placing it in the middle of Daniel’s week, the latter at the end.

Oswald J. Smith, who is properly classified as a posttribulationist, writes: “...the rapture is to take place, according to First Corinthians, fifteen, fifty-two, at the sounding of the seventh trumpet....”¹³¹

¹³¹ Oswald J. Smith, *The Book of Revelation*, 37.

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Harrison makes the bold assertion that to deny identification of the last trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52 with the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11 is to deny the infallibility of Scripture: “To place the Rapture here [at Rev 4:1] is to *disprove the unity of Scripture*. St. Paul, by inspiration of the Spirit, definitely places the Resurrection and the Rapture of the saints through the coming of Christ ‘at the last trumpet’ (1 Cor 15:51, 52). This is a specific locating of the event. Unquestionably the Holy Spirit revealed the fact and inspired the recording of it. How dare any one locate it otherwise? We do well to challenge ourselves as expositors of the Holy Writ: *Can we postulate the Rapture at any other place than that given by and through the Apostle Paul and claim to maintain the integrity of God’s Word?* Assuredly not. Granted this, the only question is one of interpretation: What is meant by ‘the last trumpet’? ‘Last’ can only mean but one of two things: last in point of time, or last in point of sequence.”¹³² Harrison goes on to reject “last in point-of time” as posttribulationism, leaving the only tenable position that of the midtribulationist.

While the identification of the last trumpet with the seventh trumpet is not original with Harrison,¹³³ it is certainly open to grave doubts which do not relate to the integrity of Scripture but only to its interpretation.

The Scriptures are full of references to trumpets as any concordance will illustrate. To pick out of all these references two unrelated trumpets and demand their identification because of the word “last” is certainly arbitrary. Others, with no conviction relative to pretribulationism versus midtribulationism, reject the identification. Ellicott states, for instance: “There are no sufficient grounds for supposing that there is here in 1 Cor 15:52 any reference to the seventh Apocalyptic trumpet (Rev 11:15).”¹³⁴ The trumpets of Revelation are entirely different from any other series of trumpets in Scripture. They are the trumpets sounded by angels. The trumpet at the rapture is the “trump of God.” The trumpets of Revelation are all connected with divine judgment upon sin and unbelief. The trump of 1 Thessalonians 4 and of 1 Corinthians 15 is a call to the elect, an act of grace, a command to the dead to rise.

The most damaging fact in the whole argument, however, is that the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11 is, after all, not the last trumpet of Scripture. According to Matthew 24:31, the elect will be gathered at the coming of Christ to establish His earthly kingdom “with a great sound of a trumpet.” While posttribulationists hold that this is identical with the seventh trumpet, midtribulationists cannot do so. In fact, it is not too much to say that this one reference alone spells the doom of midtribulationism.

¹³² *Op. cit.*, 74-75, italics in original.

¹³³ Cf. Hermann Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on the New Testament*, IV:398.

¹³⁴ Charles J. Ellicott, *St. Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 325.

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The use of “last” in reference to the trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15 is easily explained without resorting to the extremities of midtribulationism. H.A. Ironside interprets it as a familiar military expression: “When a Roman camp was about to be broken up, whether in the middle of the night or in the day, a trumpet was sounded. The first blast meant, ‘Strike tents and prepare to depart.’ The second meant, ‘Fall into line,’ and when what was called ‘the last trump’ sounded it meant, ‘March away.’”¹³⁵ The last trump of God for the church, following the gospel call and call to preparation, will be the call to go to be with the Lord. Whether or not this explanation be accepted, it illustrates that there is no necessity of relating a trump for the church with trumpets of judgment upon the unsaved. Each trumpet must be related to its own order. Any child in school knows that the last bell for one hour may be followed by a first bell for the next hour. “Last” must be understood then to relate to the time order indicated by the context.

Midtribulationists are therefore unjustified in making the identification of the seventh trumpet with the last trumpet of 1 Corinthians. The seventh trumpet is not the last trump of Scripture anyway, and the events which they claim are related to it actually occur before the seventh trumpet is sounded according to the chronology of Revelation 11. On no point does the identification commend itself.

Do the Programs for Israel and the Church Overlap?

Another objection to the midtribulational interpretation is that it confuses Israel and the church and requires an overlap of their two programs. Harrison’s argument that the existence of the temple to A.D. 70 proves that Israel’s program and that of the church overlaps is entirely untenable.¹³⁶ According to Scripture the dispensation of the law ended at the cross (2 Cor 3:11; Gal 3:25; Col 2:14). Most students of the seventy weeks of Daniel who believe the seventieth week is future also believe that the sixty-ninth week was fulfilled prior to the crucifixion of Christ. Israel’s program is therefore at a standstill and the continued existence of the temple had no relevance. Israel as a people and nation have continued throughout the present age, but their predicted program has made no specific progress since Pentecost. The necessity for such an overlapping program is not inherent in Scriptural revelation, but only a necessary adjunct of midtribulational interpretation.

Is the Hope of the Imminent Return of Christ Unscriptural?

One of the important reasons why pretribulationists believe the refutation of midtribulationism is necessary is that it directly attacks the imminency of the Lord’s return for the church much in the same fashion as is true in posttribulationism.

¹³⁵ H.A. Ironside, *Addresses on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 529.

¹³⁶ Cf. Harrison, *op. cit.*, 50-53.

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Midtribulationism has this added feature, however, which is most objectionable: it sets up a definite chronology requiring date-setting. The events of the first three and one-half years of Daniel's prophecy are specific. They begin with a covenant between a Gentile ruler and Israel in which Israel is promised protection and Palestine becomes their national home. Such a covenant could not be a secret by its very nature as it would be heralded throughout Jewry and be of great interest to the entire world. Such a covenant would, on the one hand, make the coming of Christ impossible for three and one-half years, according to the midtribulationist, and, on the other hand, make an imminent coming impossible at any time prior to the covenant. If the restrainer of 2 Thessalonians is the Holy Spirit, it also sets up an impossible chronology—the Holy Spirit taken out of the world before the church is.

The date-setting character of midtribulationism is manifest in Harrison's exposition. He identifies World War I specifically "as that which our Lord Jesus envisioned, distinguishing it from other wars through the years...."¹³⁷ His calculations are detailed: "The evidence that the War Trumpets of Revelation 8 found their realization, initially at least, in World War II is striking and conclusive. Here are a few marks of identification (will the reader please familiarize himself with chapter 8): 1—*Its Origin* (vs. 1)—the Trumpets proceed from the Seals. World War II definitely grew out of World War I—practically but a second stage. 2—*Its Timing* (vs. 1)—'about the space of half an hour.' Some time notes are merely general; this is specific. The key to divine reckoning is Peter's 'one day is with the Lord as a thousand years.' A half-hour is 1/48th of a day; divided into 1,000 years it yields 20 years, 10 months. This is the 'space' of 'silence' between the wars. Reckoned from the armistice of Nov. 11, 1918, it brings us to Sept. 11, 1939. But it says 'about'; World War II began Sept. 1, 1939; Hitler 'jumped the gun' by 10 days."¹³⁸ This far-fetched interpretation is its own refutation.

Harrison further identifies the second trumpet with Germany.¹³⁹ It should be obvious, under his chronology, if this occurs during the first three and one-half years of Daniel's last week, that the rapture is now long overdue. This refutation from history does not seem to deter midtribulationists, like another date-setters, from making alterations in their system and making another guess at identifying current events with the seals and trumpets of Revelation.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹³⁸ Harrison, *His Coming*, 42-43.

¹³⁹ *The End*, 218.

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To most students of prophecy, the midtribulation view falls for want of proof in its three strategic interpretations: its teaching that the great tribulation does not begin until the seventh trumpet, the identification of the seventh trumpet with the middle of the seventieth week of Daniel, and its further blunder of demanding identification of the seventh trumpet with the last trump of 1 Corinthians 15:52. Its arguments against imminency on other grounds¹⁴⁰ are a repetition of familiar posttribulation arguments often refuted. While the question of the time of the return of the Lord for His church is not in itself a structural principle of theology as a whole, it certainly has a vital bearing on the interpretation of many Scriptures and is integral to the teaching of the imminency of the rapture. The great majority of expositors will continue to divide between the posttribulation and pretribulation positions, with the midtribulation and partial rapture viewpoints held only by a small minority.¹⁴¹

Conclusion

Fifty Arguments for Pretribulationism

In previous discussion of premillennialism in relation to the tribulation, the respective arguments for pretribulationism, partial rapture, posttribulationism, and midtribulationism have been examined, and the pretribulation position in general sustained. By way of conclusion and summary, some fifty arguments for pretribulationism can now be proposed. It is not presumed that the statement of these arguments in themselves establishes their validity, but rather that the previous discussion supports and justifies this summary of reasons for the pretribulation view.

For the sake of brevity, the term *rapture* or *translation* is used for the coming of Christ for His church, while the term *second coming* is uniformly used as a reference to His coming to the earth to establish His millennial kingdom, an event which all consider posttribulation. While the words *rapture* and *translation* are not quite identical, they refer to the same event. By the term *rapture* reference is made to the fact that the church is “caught up” from the earth and taken to heaven. By the term *translation* the thought is conveyed that those who are thus raptured are transformed in their physical bodies from natural and corruptible bodies to spiritual, incorruptible, and immortal bodies. Strictly

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Harrison, *The End*, 231-33.

¹⁴¹ *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 1998 (electronic edition). Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 113:450, April-June 1956, 97-110.

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speaking, the dead are raised while the living are translated. In common usage, however, this distinction is not normally maintained.

In the discussion the posttribulation view is considered the principal contender against pretribulationism and is primarily in mind in the restatement of the arguments. The other positions, however, are also mentioned in so far as they oppose pretribulationism on some special point. The preceding discussion has pointed to the preponderance of argument in support of the pretribulation position, and the following restatement should serve to clarify the issues involved.

I. Historical Argument

1. The early church believed in the imminency of the Lord's return, which is an essential doctrine of pretribulationism.
2. The detailed development of pretribulation 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.

II. Hermeneutics

3. Pretribulationism is the only view which allows a literal interpretation of all Old and New Testament passages on the great tribulation.
4. Only pretribulationism distinguishes clearly between Israel and the church and their respective programs.

III. The Nature of the Tribulation

5. Pretribulationism maintains the Scriptural distinction between the great tribulation and tribulation in general which precedes it.
6. The great tribulation is properly interpreted by pretribulationists as a time of preparation for Israel's restoration (Deut 4:29–30; Jer 30:4–11). It is not the purpose of the tribulation to prepare the church for glory.
7. None of the Old Testament passages on the tribulation mention the church (Deut 4:29–30; Jer 30:4–11; Dan 9:24–27; 12:1–2).

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8. None of the New Testament passages on the tribulation mention the church (Matt 24:15–31; 1 Thess 1:9–10; 5:4–9; Rev 4–19).
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.
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.
11. The unity of Daniel's seventieth week is maintained by pretribulationists. By contrast, midtribulationism destroys the unity of Daniel's seventieth week and confuses Israel's program with that of the church.

IV. The Nature of the Church

12. The translation of the church is never mentioned in any passage dealing with the second coming of Christ after the tribulation.
13. The church is not appointed to wrath (Rom 5:9; 1 Thess 1:9–10; 5:9). The church therefore cannot enter "the great day of their wrath" (Rev 6:17).
14. The church will not be overtaken by the Day of the Lord (1 Thess 5:1–9) which includes the tribulation.
15. The possibility of a believer escaping the tribulation is mentioned in Luke 21:36.
16. The church of Philadelphia was promised deliverance from "the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Rev 3:10).

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17. It is characteristic of divine dealing to deliver believers before a divine judgment is inflicted upon the world as illustrated in the deliverance of Noah, Lot, Rahab, etc. (2 Pet 2:6–9).
18. At the time of the translation of the church, all believers go to the Father’s house in heaven, and do not remain on the earth as taught by posttribulationists (John 14:3).
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 climactic aspect of salvation by grace.
20. The Scriptures clearly teach that all, not part, of the church will be raptured at the coming of Christ for the church (1 Cor 15:51–52; 1 Thess 4:17).
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.
22. The godly remnant of the tribulation are pictured as Israelites, not members of the church as maintained by the posttribulationists.
23. The pretribulational 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 the *church* and those *in Christ* which refer to believers of this age only.

V. The Doctrine of Imminency

24. The pretribulational interpretation is the only view which teaches that the coming of Christ is actually imminent.
25. The exhortation to be comforted by the coming of the Lord (1 Thess 4:18) is significant only in the pretribulational view, and is especially contradicted by posttribulationism.
26. The exhortation to look for “the glorious appearing” (Titus 2:13) loses its significance if the tribulation must intervene first. Believers in that case should look for signs.

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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).
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.

VI. The Work of the Holy Spirit

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.
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 (2 Thess 2:6–8).
31. If the expression, “except the falling away come first, be translated literally, “except the departure come first, it would plainly show the necessity of the rapture taking place before the beginning of the tribulation.

VII. The Necessity of an Interval between the Rapture and Second Coming

32. According to 2 Corinthians 5:10, all believers of this age must appear before the judgment seat of Christ in heaven, an event never mentioned in the detailed accounts connected with the second coming of Christ to the earth.
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.
34. The marriage of Christ and the church must be celebrated in heaven before the second coming to the earth for the wedding feast (Rev 19:7–10).
35. Tribulation saints are not translated at the second coming of Christ but carry on ordinary occupations such as farming and building houses, and shall bear children (Isa 65:20–25). This would be impossible if all saints were translated at the second coming to the earth as posttribulationists teach.

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36. The judgment of the Gentiles following the second coming (Matt 25:31–46) indicates that both saved and unsaved are still in their natural bodies, which would be impossible if the translation had taken place at the second coming.
37. If the translation took place in connection with the second coming to the earth, there would be no need of separating the sheep from the goats at a subsequent judgment, but the separation would have taken place in the very act of the translation of the believers before Christ actually came to the earth.
38. The judgment 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 judgment obviously takes place sometime after the second coming and would be unnecessary if a translation of the saved had taken place previously.

VIII. 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.
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).
41. At the rapture living saints are translated, while no saints are translated in connection with the second coming of Christ to the earth.
42. At the rapture the saints go to heaven, while at the second coming to the earth the saints remain in the earth without translation.
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.
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.

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45. The rapture is described as imminent, while the second coming is preceded by definite signs.
46. The translation of living believers is truth revealed only in the New Testament, while the second coming with its attendant events is a prominent doctrine of both Testaments.
47. The rapture concerns only the saved, while the second coming deals with both saved and unsaved.
48. At the rapture Satan is not bound, while at the second coming Satan is bound and cast into the abyss.
49. No unfulfilled prophecy stands between the church and the rapture, while many signs must be fulfilled before the second coming.
50. No passage dealing with the resurrection of saints at the second coming in either Testament ever mentions a translation of living saints at the same time.¹⁴²

¹⁴² *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 1998 (electronic edition). Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 113:451, July-September 1956, 193-199.