

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Should Pretribulationists Reconsider the Rapture in Matthew 24:36-44?

Part 2 of 3

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I. INTRODUCTION

The first article in this series proposed that Jesus answered in reverse order the two questions posed by the disciples on the Mount of Olives (Matt 24:3).¹ As recorded by the apostle Matthew, the two questions introduce a purposeful chiasmic structure that lends interpretive help to the discourse. The second question (“What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?” v 3b) is answered in vv 4–35.² In vv 4–28, the Lord surveyed the future seventieth seven (week) of Daniel, i.e., the seven-year tribulation period or the eschatological day of the Lord. This conclusion is drawn from the Lord’s statement that “all these things (described in vv 4–7) are merely the beginning of birth pangs” (v 8). “Birth pangs” (*ōdin*) is a technical term drawn from the Old and New Testaments, designating a broad period of eschatological woes that is identified as the day of the Lord and precedes the Second Coming of Christ.

The phrase, “immediately [*eutheōs*] after the tribulation,” helps establish the eschatological emphasis of the 4–28 unit and eliminates any interval between v 28 and the Second Coming of Christ in vv 29–31. The design of the fig tree parable (vv 32–35) is

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¹ Blomberg is correct in observing that there are only two questions, not three. However, he believes the Greek structure employs the Granville Sharp rule. Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary, vol. 22, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 353 n. 37. Hagner also references the Granville Sharp rule. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33B (Dallas: Word, 1995), 688. But Wallace demonstrates a difference between what he calls the Granville Sharp construction (article + noun + *kai*+ noun) and the Granville Sharp rule. The latter applies only when the nouns are personal, singular, and nonproper (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the Greek New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 270–73). The construction in Matt 24:3 involves two impersonal nouns. Therefore the Granville Sharp rule does not apply. If the majority text is read, the Granville Sharp construction and rule are eliminated since its manuscripts contain two articles.

² Unless noted otherwise, Scripture will be taken from the NASB 1995.

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to set forth in illustration the nearness of the Lord's return to the signs of the tribulation. "In terms of the disciples' question in 24:3, the 'sign' is the tree's spring budding and blossoming, and Jesus' coming is the summer bearing of fruit."³

Verse 36 is introduced by *peri de*. This Greek phrase is widely recognized as beginning a shift in subject or perspective. Jesus now responds to the first question of the disciples, "When will these things happen?" (v 3a). As their twofold question implied, the disciples' mention of "these things" (*tauta*) was linked in their thinking to the immediate events leading up to the "end of the age" (v 3). In other words, the disciples were asking Jesus how they could know when these end-of-the-age events begin, i.e., when the day of the Lord begins. Jesus' reply was emphatic: the arrival of "that day" cannot be known (v 36). Paul, drawing on the previous teachings of the Lord in the Olivet Discourse, also taught that the day of the Lord would be a surprise event for the world (1 Thess 5:1–4). This exegesis of v 36 solves the insurmountable difficulty of harmonizing vv 36–44 with vv 29–31. While the Second Coming of Christ is preceded by numerous signs (vv 4–28) and follows a specific timetable of seven years, the day of the Lord and the pretribulational rapture that conjoins it are completely imminent.⁴

II. THE DAYS OF NOAH (VV 37–39)

If these conclusions about v 36 are correct, then the days-of-Noah illustration refers to the unsuspecting lifestyles that exist prior to the sudden onslaught of the day of the Lord judgments. On the other hand, if vv 37–39 are to be placed chronologically at the end of the tribulation, an incongruity arises. An unusually casual attitude toward life exists at the precise time when the tribulation judgments are being poured out in all their intensity. How could a "business-as-usual" attitude prevail during the moments, days, months, or even years immediately preceding the Second Advent?

A. THE DAYS BEFORE THE FLOOD CANNOT ILLUSTRATE THE DAYS BEFORE THE SECOND COMING

In the Noah parallel, the people "knew nothing" (v 39 NIV, NET; *ouk egnōsan*) about what was soon to happen until the flood came and took them all away.⁵ If the flood judgment

³ David L. Turner, *Matthew, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 585.

⁴ Thomas calls this "dual imminence." Robert L. Thomas, "Imminence in the NT, Especially Paul's Thessalonian Epistles," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 13 (fall 2002): 192, 199, 208. He also uses the terms "joint imminence" and "double imminence." Thomas, "The 'Coming' of Christ in Revelation 2–3," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 7 (fall 1996): 171, 179.

⁵ Walvoord feels that the Noah illustration is used in relation to the signs of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Instead of the ungodly "knowing nothing," he suggests that they could know that the flood was

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illustrates a judgment that takes place at the return of Christ “immediately after the tribulation of those days” (v 29), can it be said that the world will understand nothing of this coming destruction? At the sixth seal judgment, people of the world will hide in caves and rocks crying out to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (Rev 6:16–17). Doesn’t this reveal that the world will know that wrath has come and it will know precisely from where that wrath is coming—from God the Father and the Lamb! Hodges writes, “The flood came at a time when nothing out of the ordinary had taken place. But this would not be true of His coming if His coming occurs *at the conclusion* of the Great Tribulation. This obvious problem is often ignored.”⁶

The Noachic flood more likely corresponds to the time leading up to the sudden arrival of the day of the Lord and the seventieth seven (week) of Daniel.⁷ In Heb 11:7, the author notes that Noah was “warned by God about things not yet seen.” Leon Morris writes concerning this divine admonition, “The warning concerned things ‘not yet seen,’ i.e., events of which there was no present indication, nothing that could be observed. At the time Noah received his message from God, there was no sign of the Flood and related events.”⁸ But God’s patience ceased, suddenly the rains came down, and a massive destruction became increasingly obvious to the world. In parallel fashion, God is patient with mankind at the present time before the coming day of the Lord (2 Pet 3:9–10; cf. Rom 2:4–5). But when the day of the Lord arrives, God’s patience will cease, and worldwide destruction will begin without observable warnings (1 Thess 5:3). But the divine wrath of the day of the Lord will become increasingly obvious to the world, just as the above quote of Rev 6:16–17 implies.

Many commentators simply believe that the ordinary life patterns described in the Noachic illustration can coexist with the colossal distresses that run their course prior to

not coming because observers could see that Noah had not finished the ark and loaded all the animals. When these were finished, then observers “could have sensed that the flood was drawing near, although they could not know the day or the hour.” John F. Walvoord, “Christ’s Olivet Discourse on the Time of the End: Part IV: How Near Is the Lord’s Return?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (January–March 1972): 38. This is general predictability with specific unpredictability. Concerning this interpretation of handling v 36, see the first article in this series, John F. Hart, “Should Pretribulationists Reconsider the Rapture in Matthew 24:36–44? Part 1,” *Journal of the Grace Theological Society* 20 (Spring 2008): 67.

⁶ Zane C. Hodges, *Jesus, God’s Prophet: His Teaching about the Coming Surprise* (Mesquite, TX: Kerugma, 2006), 24.

⁷ “He [Christ] used the coming of the flood in Noah’s day and the destruction of Sodom in Lot’s day as examples of His imminent return (Luke 17:22–37).” Thomas, “Imminence in the NT,” 193.

⁸ Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 12:116.

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Christ's Second Coming. Normal pursuits will continue right up to Christ's return.⁹ Gundry strictly denies the possibility of a pretribulational rapture in vv 37–41 on the basis of the same reasoning. "But are we to think that people in the tribulation will stop eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage? The emphasis in the words of Jesus does not fall upon a normal condition of life, but upon the unexpected suddenness of His advent to those who will be engaged otherwise than in watching for Him."¹⁰

But this understanding does not adequately explain the text. First, Gundry wants the nature of "that day" to be sudden and unexpected only for the ones who are not watchful (the unbelievers). But "that day" is sudden and unexpected for all since no one knows the time of its arrival (v 36). Knowing *that* the day of the Lord will come (believers) is not the same as knowing *when* the day of the Lord will come (no one knows except the Father). Second, the lifestyles depicted are those that have existed in every generation since the earliest days of human history (Noah). Contrary to Gundry, this implies an emphasis on the normalcy and indifference prior to the day of the Lord.¹¹ The illustration that follows vv 37–39 about two men working in the field and two women grinding at the mill (vv 41–42) also argues for the stress on normalcy in the passage.

Moo notes that the days of Noah are compared to the Parousia (*parousia*, v 37), not to the day of the Lord. Since the same word has been used for the posttribulational return of the Lord elsewhere in the Discourse (24:3, 27), should it not refer to that event in vv 37 and 39?¹² In response, a few factors must be kept in mind. First, when Jesus does describe His return in vv 29–31, He avoids the use of the Greek noun *parousia* ("coming, presence").

⁹ Henry Alford, *The Four Gospels, The Greek New Testament* (Boston: Lee and Shephard, 1878), 1:246; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 366; Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew, A Commentary: Volume 2: The Churchbook: Matthew 13–28* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 524; D. A. Carson, "Matthew," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:509; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols., *International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 3:381; Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* (Dallas: Word, 1995), 719–20.

¹⁰ Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 202.

¹¹ Bruner comments, "The crime indicated by Jesus in this verse is not *gross sin* (the people of Noah's generation are not doing vicious things in Jesus' description); it is *secular indifference*. The evil here is immersion in the everyday without thought for the Last Day" (italics original). Bruner, *Matthew: The Churchbook*, 524. Of course, Genesis records gross sin in Noah's day, specifically that the earth was "filled with violence" (Gen 6:11, 13). Davies and Allison suggest that "eating and drinking" and "marrying and giving in marriage" may carry pejorative connotations. The former recalls the drunkenness following the flood (Gen 9:20–21) and the latter brings to mind the sin of the sons of God in Gen 6:4. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:380, n. 46. Matthew 24:49 describes the evil slave as one who "begins to ... eat and drink with drunkards."

¹² Douglas J. Moo, "The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position," in Gleason L. Archer et al., *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 177.

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“The verb depicting the coming in 24:30 is *erchomenon*, but the noun designating the ‘coming’ in 24:37 is *parousia*, a term that easily covers a wider span.”¹³ The Greek word *parousia* is capable of a more broad conception than just “arrival.” This appears to be confirmed by the parallel between Matt 24:37 and Luke 17:26. Bock states that Matt 24:37 “almost exactly matches” Luke 17:26.¹⁴ The difference is that where Matthew has *parousia*, Luke has “the days [plural] of the Son of Man.”¹⁵

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Generally, our English term “the First Coming of Christ” refers to the thirty plus years of Christ’s life, not just His conception or birth. So the thought of (the second) “coming” resident in the Greek word *parousia* carries the nuance of a span of time. The *parousia* of Christ involves His arrival in rapture, His subsequent hidden presence in the world while protecting Israel and carrying out the judgments of Rev 4–18, and His final manifestation (*tē epiphaneia tēs parousias autou*, “the manifestation of his coming,” 2 Thess 2:8 NRSV) after the Great Tribulation.¹⁶ Even in the posttribulational scheme, the Parousia includes a rapture and a return of Christ separated by an interval of time. The interval is simply confined to a very small portion of the tribulation period (or posttribulational period).¹⁷ Therefore, if Scripture warrants a longer interval (and it does) between the rapture and final manifestation of Christ,¹⁸ objections cannot be sustained on the argument that the Parousia is a single, simplified event. Some single events are not simplified and cover more than a moment in time.

Second, 1 Thess 5:4 and 2 Pet 3:10 explain that the day of the Lord comes as a thief. But Luke 12:39; Rev 3:3; and 16:15 state that Christ comes as a thief. The two events are simultaneous. If the day of the Lord and the rapture are pretribulational and coterminous, comparing the days of Noah to the day of the Lord or to the Parousia of Jesus is virtually synonymous. Since the days of Noah best describe a time before the future seven-year tribulation begins, then the days of Noah also best describe a pretribulational Parousia of Christ before the beginning of Daniel’s seventieth seven.

¹³ Thomas, “Imminence in the NT,” 194 n. 8. See also Hodges, *Jesus, God’s Prophet*, 25.

¹⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1432.

¹⁵ Bock, however, views the “day” (singular) of the Son of Man (Luke 17:24, 30) and the “days” of the Son of Man (Luke 17:22, 26) as identical and the plural does not refer to a period of time. *Ibid.*, 2:1428.

¹⁶ Cf. Hodges, *Jesus, God’s Prophet*, 26–27, 62–63.

¹⁷ Paul D. Feinberg, “The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture,” in *Three Views*, 81.

¹⁸ Midtribulationists, like pretribulationists, understand the Parousia to involve a span of time; Gleason L. Archer, “Response to the Posttribulation Rapture Position,” in *Three Views*, 213–18.

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The calamities that precede the Second Coming of Christ will be so severe that the human race will be close to extinction apart from the Lord's intervention (Matt 24:22).¹⁹ The real question concerning the days of Noah is this: Would Jesus use such a description of casual lifestyles to communicate what the world would be like when "there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall" (Matt 24:21)? This seems most unlikely.

B. THE DAYS BEFORE THE FLOOD AND THE TEACHINGS OF PAUL AND PETER

Pauline Teaching. What is more appealing exegetically is the striking similarity of Christ's Noahic illustration and Paul's concept of the day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 5. The similarities of thought are convincing evidence that the source of Paul's teaching was the Olivet Discourse.²⁰ Kim first notes the strong parallels between Jesus' teachings and 1 Thess 5:2–7. In observing a series of phrases in 1 Thessalonians 4–5, he concludes, "So the formulas, 'in the word of the Lord' [1 Thess 4:15] and 'you yourselves know accurately' [1 Thess 5:2], which follow each other so closely in the wake of Paul's reminder of his previous instructions 'through the Lord Jesus' (1 Thess 4:2), both indicate that in 1 Thess 4:15–5:7 Paul is alluding to the eschatological teachings of Jesus."²¹

If this is the case, Paul and Jesus must be dealing with very similar eschatological concerns.²² For Paul, the sudden arrival of the day of the Lord will be preceded by a time of "peace and safety" (1 Thess 5:1–3). Once the day of the Lord begins, unexpected destruction begins for the unbeliever. The believer, whether alert for the Lord's return or not, will be delivered from that wrath by the rapture (1 Thess 5:9–10).²³ Pretribulationists appropriately recognize that Paul's teaching of a peaceful and secure world that precedes

¹⁹ J. F. Strombeck, *First the Rapture* (Moline, IL: Strombeck Agency, 1950), 69, comments, "There can be no complacency nor unexpected destruction after the most terrible destruction of all time has begun."

²⁰ G. Henry Waterman, "The Source of Paul's Teaching on the 2nd Coming of Christ in 1 and 2 Thessalonians," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 18 (spring 1975): 106–7. Thomas believes that the origin of all teaching about imminence in the NT can be found in Christ. Thomas, "Imminence in the NT," 192, 198. Hodges (*Jesus, God's Prophet*, 27–30) develops this perspective further, proposing that both Paul (1 Thess 4–5) and Peter (2 Pet 3) derived their teaching about the day of the Lord, the thief in the night, and the new revelation of the rapture from this passage in the Olivet Discourse. Blomberg (*Matthew*, 367) implies that John (Rev 3:3; 16:15) also picked up his use of the thief imagery from Jesus in Matthew 24.

²¹ Seyoon Kim, "Jesus, Sayings of," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 477.

²² This conclusion would go against Turner's thought that "Jesus' language does not approximate a distinction between a pretribulation rapture and a posttribulation coming of Jesus to earth, as Paul arguably does (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 2 Thess. 1:6–10)." Turner, *Matthew*, 590.

²³ Zane C. Hodges, "1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 and the Rapture," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 6 (October–December 2000): 31–32.

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the day of the Lord cannot easily be harmonized with John's portrait of the end of the tribulation when the world will gather its armies in war against the coming Christ (Rev 16:13–16; 19:19). Paul's "peace and safety" is an indicator both of when the day of the Lord will come as well as when the church saints will be delivered from that day by rapture. Both must be before or at the very inception of the tribulation. If the day of the Lord comes unexpectedly at a time of "peace and safety," then the rapture also comes at a time of "peace and safety."

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This Pauline scenario—that the day of the Lord will come suddenly at a time of "peace and safety"—is quite comparable to the descriptions found in Matt 24:39 ("they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage").²⁴ In the Lord's illustration, the days of Noah were primarily the days before (*pro*, v 38) the judgment of the flood when life continued as normal. During the tribulation, the very existence of all life will be in such jeopardy (Matt 24:22) that the tranquility of life described in Matt 24:37–39 could hardly take place. Therefore, the Noah illustration admirably portrays the universal, surprise arrival of the day of the Lord as taught by Paul.

Petrine Teaching. Peter's comments about the day of the Lord in 2 Peter are equivalent to that of Paul's. Peter links the flood to the eschatological judgment (2 Pet 2:4–9). Of interest is the phrase in 2 Pet 2:9 concerning God's rescue of the righteous from "tribulation" (*ek peirasmou rhyesthai*). This phrase suggests the rapture of Rev 3:10 where believers are kept "from the hour of trial" (*ek tēs hōras tou peirasmou*). In responding to some of Gundry's arguments that the flood illustrates the deliverance of church saints at the climax of the seventieth seven of Daniel (a posttribulational interpretation), Edgar interprets 2 Pet 2:9 in its context.

The word Peter uses in v 9 is *peirasmou*, the same word which occurs in Rev 3:10 ... It is clear that "trial," *peirasmou*, does not mean everyday, routine trials. The trials described are the universal flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The flood was a judgment of God on the entire world. It was a physical judgment, not eternal judgment. This parallels the tribulation period and is

²⁴ Waterman, "Source of Paul's Teaching," 110. To find a time in the tribulation for "peace and safety," Jerome proposed a short break between the tribulation and the return of Christ (cited in Bruner, *Matthew 13–28*, 524). Gundry attempts to explain the "peace and safety" of 1 Thess 5:2 as the wish or expectation of men rather than the actual conditions; Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 92. According to Charles C. Ryrie, *Come Quickly, Lord Jesus: What You Need to Know about the Rapture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1996), 115, Gundry's view is impossible since "the [1 Thess 5] passage contrasts peace and safety with destruction. Now if peace and safety means a wish in the midst of a time of war and danger, then any contrast with destruction that will follow disappears." Cf. the same response to Gundry by Thomas R. Edgar, "An Exegesis of Rapture Passages," in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, ed. Wesley R. Willis, John R. Master, and Charles C. Ryrie (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 207.

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described by the same term (*peirasmou*).... The statement that God knows to deliver from “trial,” *peirasmou*, must mean from times of physical trial intended for the ungodly, a description which fits the tribulation period.... Neither Noah nor Lot went through the trial as did the ungodly.... Noah was in the ark before the flood started. He did not remain somehow to be protected miraculously through the flood. Both Noah and Lot were spared the “trial” ... Gundry attempts to avoid the significance of this verse. He states that “Noah went through and emerged from the flood.” But Noah did not swim in the waters for a time and eventually emerge by being fished out. Noah was placed in a physical, geographical place of safety. This is not significantly different from the church being in the air with the Lord and possibly over the earth during the tribulation period.²⁵

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What Edgar is suggesting is that the deliverance of Noah and Lot illustrates the rapture of the church before the day of the Lord, not the deliverance of saints at the climax of the Great Tribulation. His eschatological interpretation of the deliverance of Noah and Lot in 2 Peter 2 is sound. After all, eschatology is a major theme in 2 Pet (cf. 1:16–21; 3:3–13). Additionally, Peter is quite aware of the teachings of Paul’s letters (2 Pet 3:15–16) and would therefore understand Paul’s teachings on the day of the Lord and the rapture. It is in the immediately preceding context of his remark about Paul’s epistles that Peter himself directly mentions the thief-like arrival of the day of the Lord (2 Pet 3:10).

In 2 Peter 3, the apostle again mentions the flood (v 6). False teachers will ridicule the Parousia of Christ and the promise of Christ’s return (2 Pet 3:3–4). Their mocking is based on the fact that life will proceed without any evidence of divine intervention (v 4)—similar to Paul’s teaching that peace and safety will precede the sudden destruction of the day of the Lord (1 Thess 5:3). But what the false teachers have purposefully neglected (*lanthanei gar autous touto thelontas*, lit., “for this escapes them [and they are] willing,” v 5) is the flood of Noah’s day (2 Pet 3:5–6). In Peter’s thinking, then, the judgment of the flood is thoroughly aligned with the time leading up to the imminent arrival of the day of the Lord (the seventieth seven of Daniel).²⁶ Can we not conclude from this that the imminent judgment of Noah’s day described in Matt 24:37–38 exceptionally parallels the imminent day of the Lord described by Paul and Peter in their epistles? If 2 Pet 2:9 and 1 Thess 5:9 declare a deliverance from the day of the Lord by a pretribulational rapture for the

²⁵ Thomas R. Edgar, “Robert H. Gundry and Revelation 3:10,” *Grace Theological Journal* 3 (Spring 1982): 44–45. For the benefit of the English reader, Greek words in the quote have been transliterated.

²⁶ Though not writing from a pretribulational position, Bauckham’s comment is appropriate: “Since the Flood and the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah are prototypes of eschatological judgment, the situations of Noah and Lot are typical of the situation of Christians in the final days before the Parousia.” Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1983), 253.

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church, and if Peter and Paul derived their teaching from the Lord in the Olivet Discourse, then in Matt 24:38 Noah's deliverance from the universal judgment of the flood best pictures the church's deliverance by rapture before the great eschatological "flood," the day of the Lord.²⁷

C. THE TYPOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF NOAH AND THE FLOOD

While pretribulation writers have sometimes attempted to support a pretribulation rapture with typological support, most pretribulation scholars today have avoided typological evidence for a pretribulation rapture.²⁸ Gundry comments, "But although the NT compares the Flood and the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah to the destruction which will take place at Jesus' coming, nowhere do the deliverances of Noah and Lot stand for the rapture."²⁹ Most pretribulationists concur with this assessment. But in contradistinction to Gundry's viewpoint, evidence can be gleaned for Noah's deliverance from the flood as a type of the deliverance of the church at the rapture.³⁰

Several OT passages imply the beginning stages in the development of the flood as a prophetic type of the end of the world in apocalyptic literature.³¹ Isa 54:9 speaks of the

²⁷ In Luke 17:26–28, the parallel to Matthew 24:37, Noah and Lot appear side by side just as in 2 Pet 2:5–8. The juxtaposition of the flood (Noah) and Sodom (Lot) is occasionally found in Jewish literature (Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1431 n. 15). But it is more likely that Peter is borrowing from Jesus' teaching in the Olivet Discourse than from Jewish traditional sources. For example, Sirach 16:7–8 parallels the "ancient giants who revolted" with the "neighbors of Lot" (NRSV), but the passage does not mention Noah by name or Lot directly. The Testament of Naphtali 3:4–5 juxtapose Sodom and the Watchers who changed their nature (flood). But these references do not mention Lot or Noah by name, and Sodom is mentioned before the flood. The Wisdom of Solomon 10:4–7 mention neither Noah nor Lot by name, and interpose the Tower of Babel (10:5) between the two judgments. Third Maccabees 2:4–5 set side by side the flood and Sodom, but again do not mention Noah and Lot by name.

²⁸ Walvoord writes, "That the ark of Noah has typical significance can hardly be questioned." Walvoord, "Series in Christology, Part 4: The Incarnation of the Son of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 105 (October–December 1948): 415. He applied the typology both to the church and to believers in the tribulation. "The deliverance of Noah will have a large-scale repetition in the deliverance of the church before the time of tribulation which will overtake the world and also the preservation of some who believe in that tribulation time." *Ibid.*, 417. Cf. also Walvoord, "The Incarnation of the Son of God, II: Christological Typology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 105 (July–September 1948): 295. Chafer applied the type of Noah and the ark in a similar fashion. "In particular it foreshadows the future preservation of the saints in the period of great tribulation before the Second Coming of Christ. It may also be applied to the true church which will be caught up to be with Christ before this final period begins and will return to the earth after the judgment is completed." Lewis Sperry Chafer, "The Saving Work of the Triune God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 105 (July 1948): 295.

²⁹ Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 61.

³⁰ Cf. the above quote by Edgar on 2 Pet 2:9.

³¹ Jack P. Lewis, *A Study of the Interpretation of Noah and the Flood in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 9.

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days of Noah in comparison to another day in which God will unleash His “flood of anger” (v 8 NJB).³² The verse probably speaks of the Great Tribulation.³³ In Isa 24:14–18, the phrase “the windows above are opened” (LXX, *thyrides ek tou ouranou*, “windows of heaven”) may also contribute to an OT typology concerning the flood of Genesis (cf. the Hebrew of Gen. 7:11; “the windows of heaven,” NKJV). This Isaiah passage falls within the Little Apocalypse of Isa (24:1–27:13) and relates to the tribulation judgments,³⁴ the seventieth seven of Daniel, and the day of the Lord.³⁵ The reference in Dan 9:26 to the end of the city and the sanctuary that comes as a flood (*kataklysmos*, LXX, Theodotion) may have a part in this theme.³⁶ If the flood typifies the day of the Lord, then the deliverance of Noah at the flood appears to portray the deliverance of the godly before the day of the Lord, not from within the day of the Lord.

Psalm 29:10 may also depict the flood as an eschatological event. It uses the Hebrew word *mabbûl* (“flood”), which is found elsewhere only in the flood narrative of Gen (6:17; 7:6–7, 10, 17; 9:11, 15, 28; 10:1, 32; 11:10). Psalm 29 is a Divine Warrior victory song along the lines of the royal or kingship psalms of Psalm 96–98.³⁷ The psalm contains strong similarities to Exodus 15.³⁸ Exodus 15, the Song of Moses, is cited prophetically in Rev 15:3 in relation to the epitome of holy wars, the Second Coming of Christ. Psalm 29 also contains aspects of apocalyptic literature, including theophanic imagery and “mountain” symbolism.³⁹ The unusual sevenfold repetition of the phrase “the voice of the Lord” (*qôl*

³² For a discussion of why the Hebrew word *šešep* (a hapax legomenon with an uncertain meaning) in Isaiah 54:8 is translated “flood,” see Michael A. Grisanti, “*šešep*,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, Willem A. VanGemeren, gen. ed., 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 5:227–28.

³³ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Chicago: Moody, 1959), 461.

³⁴ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (San Antonio: Ariel Press, 1982), 126–27.

³⁵ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study of Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), 195.

³⁶ John F. Walvoord, *Daniel* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 231, entertains the possibility that the closing remarks of Daniel 9:26, with its double reference to the “end,” may refer to the future destruction of Jerusalem at the end of the age (though he decides against it).

³⁷ Tremper Longman, III, “Psalm 98: A Divine Warrior Victory Song,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27 (September 1984): 274. Historically, the Divine Warrior victory songs celebrate “the return of Yahweh the commander of the heavenly hosts who is leading the Israelite army back home after waging victorious holy war.” *Ibid.*, 268.

³⁸ Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 5:253. Longman classifies Exodus 15 as one of the Divine Warrior victory songs found outside the psalter. Longman, “Divine Warrior Victory Song,” 274. Elsewhere he states, “[I]t is true that Yahweh’s kingship is frequently associated with his warring activity [a footnote cites Ex. 15]. Thus the reaffirmation of Yahweh’s kingship follows the successful waging of holy war.” *Ibid.*, 271.

³⁹ Cf. J. Daryl Charles. “The Angels, Sonship, and Birthright in the Letter to the Hebrews,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (June 1990): 173 n. 12.

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yhwh; Ps 29:3–5, 7–9) leading up to v 10 brings to mind the voice of Yahweh at the day of the Lord (Joel 2:11; 3:14–16).⁴⁰ According to Görg, Ps 29:10 communicates the idea that the Lord takes His seat on His throne at a particular point in time, and subsequently exercises permanent sovereignty.⁴¹ In other words, Ps 29:10 may not address the universal reign of the Lord or exclusively the victory of Yahweh over the forces of nature or Baal. Instead it may address the Lord's victory over world chaos at the Second Coming when Christ takes His seat on the Davidic throne (Matt 25:31).⁴²

This prophetic typology is developed in the NT where the flood is the supreme figure of the final eschatological judgment.⁴³ In the Noahic analogy of the Olivet Discourse, the Greek formula *hōsper* ("just as") ... *houtōs* ("so also") (Matt 24:37, 38–39)⁴⁴ may be intended to disclose a type-antitype (Noah-Christ) relationship such as is found in Matt 12:40 (Jonah-Christ) and Rom 5:12, 19 (Adam-Christ).

But the question remains as to what Noah and the flood typify more explicitly. Do they typify the judgment of the ungodly at the Second Coming of Christ and the rescue of elect Jews? Or do they represent the deliverance of the church at the rapture and the sudden destruction for the unbeliever brought about by the arrival of the day of the Lord? An answer may be found in the inspired typology of 1 Pet 3:20.

It has already been proposed that the Lord's words in the Olivet Discourse have given rise to the 1 and 2 Peter references to Noah. The exact phrase, "days of Noah" found in Matt 24:37 (par. Luke 17:26), also appears in 1 Pet 3:20. In the following verse (3:21), the word *antitypos* ("corresponding to, antitype") appears and establishes an unquestionable typological view of the flood.

⁴⁰ Craigie suggests (with skepticism) a similar idea. "There are no explicit references to Ps 29 in the NT, though it has been suggested that the 'seven thunders' of Rev 10:3 have Ps 29 as their background; such a view is far from certain." Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 250.

⁴¹ M. Görg, "yāšab," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 15 vols., ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 6:437.

⁴² Cf. the beasts of Daniel 7 and the seven-headed beast of Revelation 13 that come up from the sea.

⁴³ William Joseph Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), 112–13; cf. 175, 206–7. Dalton says that Jewish rabbinical writings also view the flood as the divine judgment *par excellence*; *ibid.*, 112. Lewis also sees Matthew 24:37 as a flood typology. Lewis, *Noah and the Flood in Jewish and Christian Literature*, 113, 115.

⁴⁴ The majority text has *hōsper* ... *houtōs* twice. The Nestle-Aland text, 27th ed., has *hōsper* ... *houtōs* in v 37, but *hōs* ... *houtōs* in vv 38–39. Matthew's Gospel favors both *hōsper* and *hōs*. Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982, 1994), 492–93.

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The NIV supplies the word “water” in its translation of 1 Pet 3:21, “this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you.” The NASB is more in keeping with the vagueness of the Greek, “Corresponding to that [ho], baptism now saves you.” The interpretive question is: To what does the relative pronoun *ho* refer? Nearly all commentators are persuaded that “water” (*hydatos*) in the previous verse is the antecedent. However, the water did not save Noah and his family but was instead an instrument of divine judgment. The ark saved Noah. Heb 11:7 is clear on the matter: “By faith Noah ... prepared an ark for the salvation of his household.” The relative pronoun in 1 Pet 3:21 makes reference to the word “ark” (*kibōtou*) in the previous verse, not to “water” (*hydatos*). If the type is the ark⁴⁵ and not the water of the flood, neither is the antitype (*antitypos*) water baptism. In context, the antitype is better taken as Spirit baptism, which places believers into the invisible church, the body of Christ. In other words, for Peter, Noah’s entrance into the ark is a type of believers entering the invisible church by means of Spirit baptism.⁴⁶

A thorough exegesis of 1 Pet 3:21 is impossible here. But a few brief comments will help establish the potential validity of Spirit baptism as the intended meaning of “baptism” in 1 Pet 3:21.

(1) In 1 Pet 3:16, Peter leads into the 3:18–21 context by using Paul’s technical term *en christō* (“in Christ”), which takes place only through Spirit baptism. Outside of Paul’s seventy-three uses of the term, it is found only in 1 Pet (3:16; 5:10, 14).

(2) All commentators recognize that 1 Pet 4:1–6 (the immediately following context to 1 Pet 3:20) parallels Romans 6—a passage that outlines the ministry of Spirit baptism. (The

⁴⁵ “Such ‘typological’ shaping of the Flood narrative by the author of the Pentateuch is remarkably similar to the later reading of this passage in 1 Pet 3:21. In that passage the ark is seen to prefigure the saving work of Christ as it is pictured in NT baptism.” John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 2:85. Sailhamer does not clarify the kind of baptism to which he is referring. Nevertheless, his comment (that the ark is typological) is appropriate.

⁴⁶ Typological interpretation of Noah and the ark was developed to an unbiblical extreme in the third century and later. The ark and all its details, even its measurements, were allegorized. For example, Augustine maintained that there was no salvation for those outside the Roman church because there was no salvation outside the ark. For further details of later church fathers and their typological treatment of the flood, see Lewis, *Noah and the Flood in Jewish and Christian Literature*, 156–80. According to Hippolytus, Callistus, a pastor of a church in Rome (ca. A.D. 220), was the first person to claim he could forgive people’s sins on behalf of God. Hippolytus said that this claim was based on the fact that the church was typified by the ark of Noah in which were both clean and unclean animals. Therefore, Callistus reasoned that anyone in the church guilty of sin should be permitted to remain within the church. Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, IX, 7. Such unbiblical extremes are not a substantial reason for rejecting Peter’s typology: the ark is a type of the invisible church that is entered by Spirit baptism.

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baptism of Romans 6 is unlikely water baptism since water is never mentioned in Romans 6.)

(3) An emphasis is clearly placed on “spirit/Spirit” (1 Pet 3:18–, 19) in the context.

(4) At v 21, the New American Standard Bible uses the phrase, “an appeal to God for a good conscience.” However, *eperōtēma* (“appeal”) is better translated as “response” (NIV Notes) or “answer” (KJV, NKJV, Amp.). By our Spirit baptism into Christ’s death and resurrection, believers have been made “alive to God” (Rom 6:11) and can respond or answer to Him from a clear conscience (“as alive from the dead,” Rom 6:13).⁴⁷

(5) Evangelical commentators who do not hold to baptismal regeneration are ultimately forced to deny Peter’s claim that “[water] baptism now saves you.” This is unnecessary if Spirit baptism is in view. In this dispensation, no one can have the gift of eternal life if he or she does not also have the baptism of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). Since the apostle Paul declared that the church is delivered by rapture before the tribulation wrath (1 Thess 5:9–10; cf. Rev 3:10), and in Peter’s typology the ark represents the church (i.e., everyone who is joined to Christ by Spirit baptism),); then the deliverance of Noah and his family in the ark logically typify the pretribulation rapture of the church and deliverance from the coming day of the Lord.⁴⁸ Even if this interpretation of 1 Pet 3:20–21 is rejected, pretribulationists must accept the fact that in this passage Noah and the flood biblically typify something relevant for first-century readers as members of the NT church, not something relevant for Israel in the Tribulation.

⁴⁷ Congdon offers similar points: “For this reason it would appear that the ‘baptism’ is the baptism of the Spirit into the body of Christ. Other reasons for believing this to be Spirit baptism are: (1) it ‘saves,’ which water baptism could not do; (2) it is able to give a person a good conscience, which no outward ordinance could ...; (3) it is ‘baptism ... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ’ — therefore, the same truth as found in Roman 6:4, 5.... If this is true, then the baptism of the Spirit is closely associated with the work of remaking and taking away the stain of the unregenerate conscience. This would remove even farther the possibility that water baptism is in view here.” Roger Douglass Congdon, “The Doctrine of Conscience,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 102 (October–December 1945): 481. Bennetch remarks, “[Noah was] one whose testimony to ‘the world of the ungodly’ took the tangible form of an ark or boat able to save from a flood judgment, comparable now to the Spirit’s baptism into Christ for salvation.” John Henry Bennetch, “Exegetical Studies in 1 Peter: Part 15,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 101 (April–June 1944): 194. Chafer favored this view. Lewis Sperry Chafer, “The Baptism of the Holy Spirit,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 109 (July–September 1952): 215.

⁴⁸ When Peter says that Spirit baptism “now saves you” (1 Pet 3:21), other meanings for *sōzō* (“save”) besides justification-salvation are possible. However, Peter does not seem to have in mind Paul’s salvation from wrath by rapture (1 Thess 5:9–10) unless it is by indirect reference.

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Perhaps the typology may be extended.⁴⁹ In the “days of Noah,” before the flood (Matt 24:37; Luke 17:26–27), God was waiting patiently (“the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah,” 1 Pet 3:20). In Thiessen’s opinion, Gen 6:3 (“My Spirit will not contend with man forever ... his days will be a hundred and twenty years”) describes the work of the Spirit restraining wickedness and seeking repentance during the days of Noah. This fittingly parallels the ministry of the Holy Spirit as the “Restrainer” during the church age as taught by Paul in 2 Thess 2:6–8. Once the Holy Spirit is removed through the pretribulational rapture of the church, then the day of the Lord comes and the lawless one (the Antichrist or Beast) is revealed.⁵⁰

We might further observe (but tentatively) from the analogy that Noah and his family were not rescued out of the floodwaters after they had begun—a rescue that would more closely match a midtribulational or posttribulational rapture. Not a drop of rain touched them. In fact, Gen 7:4, 10 record that Noah and his family entered the ark seven days before the rains fell on the earth.⁵¹ Kidner notices the correspondence between the seven days in the ark and the seventieth seven of Daniel. Although not speaking for a particular millennial position, he writes, “In the vision of the end (Dan 9:27) the symbol of a final seven days or years, and of its shortening, may be intended to call to mind this closing of a day of grace.”⁵² Perhaps the reverse symbolism is also possible. The special seven days in the ark are designed by God to prophesy typologically the relationship of the church to the devastating judgments of Daniel’s seventieth seven.⁵³

⁴⁹ For typological implications of Noah and the flood not included in this article, see Walvoord, “Series in Christology, Part 4,” 415–17.

⁵⁰ Henry Clarence Thiessen, “Will the Church Pass through the Tribulation? Part 3,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 92 (July 1935): 305. However, elsewhere Thiessen held that Noah might be a type of the remnant of Israel rescued from the tribulation, and Lot in his removal to Zoar may be a type of the church (Luke 17:26–32). *Ibid.*, 295. That the “restrainer” of 2 Thess 2 refers to the ministry of the Spirit through the church as believers preach the gospel, see Charles E. Powell, “The Identity of the ‘Restrainer’ in 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 (July 1997): 331.

⁵¹ Some debate exists over when Noah entered the ark. A few commentators who that understand the text to mean that Noah entered the ark and remained there for seven days before the rains began include John A. McLean, “Another Look at Rosenthal’s ‘Pre-Wrath Rapture,’” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (October 1991): 394; Allan P. Ross, “Genesis,” in *Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1985), 39; John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1002), 314 n. 15. Lewis implies that this was the view of rabbinic Judaism. Lewis, *Noah and the Flood in Jewish and Christian Literature*, 141.

⁵² Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1967), 90.

⁵³ It may be objected that the rain (judgment) did not come until after the seven days, but the judgments of the day of the Lord take place during the seven-year tribulation. This fact and others do not align with the typology being proposed. But it must be remembered that all or most of the details of a type (a historical event or person) do not need to correspond to the antitype. Paul shows us numerous ways that

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All of these evidences concerning the scriptural account of the flood lead to the conclusion that the days of Noah prophesy typologically the prevailing attitude that exists prior to the eschatological judgments of the day of the Lord and the pretribulational rapture of the church.

III. CONCLUSION

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A serious dilemma exists if Matt 24:36 has reference to the Second Coming of vv 29–31. But through a careful notice of the *peri de* construction that introduces v 36, the exegete may perceive the beginning of a slightly new subject matter—that of the imminent coming of the day of the Lord and the pretribulational rapture of the church. The terms “that day” and “(that) hour” have reference to the coming day of the Lord, not the posttribulational return of Christ mentioned in 24:29–31. Verse 36, therefore, concerns the unpredictability and imminence of that eschatological event.

Jesus’ Noahic illustration also pictures the coming judgments of the day of the Lord. Life before the flood as a portrait of the future parallels Paul’s concept of the world attitude that prevails prior to the thief-like advent of the day of the Lord (1 Thess 5:1–3). Additionally, as early as the OT and confirmed in the New, the flood has become prophetically typological of the coming eschatological judgments, i.e., the tribulation or seventieth seven of Daniel. To be more specific, 1 Pet 3:20–21 lends support that Noah’s ark prefigures the church. But like Noah and his family, believers in the church will be delivered from the day of the Lord (2 Pet 2:9) by the pretribulational rapture. Nothing about Noah (or Lot) in 1 or 2 Peter potentially symbolizes the rescue of the Jews (and/or Gentiles) at the close of the tribulation period. As the flood swept away the unsuspecting pagans of the flood era, so the unbeliever will be swept away in the unsuspecting judgment of the tribulation wrath.

In the third study on Matt 24:36–44, a closer investigation will be made of the word for “took ... away” (*airō*) in v 39 and the word for “will be taken” in vv 40–41 (*paralambanō*). An examination of *aphiēmi* (“will be left”), the contrasting word to *paralambanō*, will also be examined. The major question is this: What is the natural sense of these Greek words and how does this contribute to the pretribulational rapture in the passage? It will be necessary also to examine the nature of the thief imagery in the Discourse and in other NT literature, and its bearing on the passage. Consideration will be given to the command to “watch” (*grēgoreō*) for the Lord’s Parousia as it is presented in the NT. The series will

Adam does not parallel Christ (Rom. 5:15–17). Nevertheless, he calls Adam a type of Christ (Rom. 5:14, 18).

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conclude with brief answers to a few key objections proposed by pretribulationists against finding the rapture in Matt 24:36–44.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Hart, J. F. (2008). "Should Pretribulationists Reconsider the Rapture in Matthew 24:36–44? Part 2 of 3." *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* Volume 21, 21(40), 45–63.