

Will the Church Go Through the Great Tribulation?

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There are godly, knowledgeable, and earnest students with opposite answers to the question posed here. Reared as a Dispensationalist, I long answered No—and doubt that a Yes can really be acceptable in that system. Here I will give reasons that forced me to change my answer. Except where stated otherwise, Bible quotations are from the New International Version (NIV). Jesus' royal title has usually been expressed as Messiah rather than Christ. Except in quotations, "Tribulation" meaning the Great Tribulation, is capitalized. KJV is the King James Version.

Posing the Question¹

"In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33b, KJV)

"We must through much tribulation
enter into the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22b, KJV)

I will also keep you from the hour of trial
that is going to come upon the whole world
to test those who live on the earth. (Rev. 3:10b)

Why study this controversial subject? Some have the attitude "Que será será, so why bother? If theologians don't agree, who am I to decide?" That attitude closes one's mind to much God has said—and to the related work by His Spirit. It treats our Father and Teacher as inept—and His Word as irrelevant. It was He who gave us showers of Scriptures about His Son's return—and many about our being gathered to Him. Indeed, such Scriptures are sometimes confusing—especially if we remain ignorant and biased. Overcoming our ignorance and bias sometimes requires painful effort. Even then we will not resolve all questions. Yet, God is not inept. If we humbly drink His water, it will heal our souls. His divine wisdom will refresh us. His truth will cleanse us—and prepare us for the future He has revealed.

Trouble until the kingdom comes. We who believe in Jesus the Messiah have the marvelous and rock-solid hope of our eternal inheritance. "Has not God chosen those who are poor...to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?" (James 2:5). He taught us to pray for it: "Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10). But while seeking that kingdom, we live in a hostile and godless world. In it, as we read in two of the verses above, we are sure to have tribulation (meaning misery or distress, or what causes it). In fact, that trouble will get worse just before the kingdom comes (Matt. 24:12-13; 2 Tim. 3:1-5, 12-13; 4:3-4). Many Scriptures in both Testaments warn God's people of a worldwide time of special trouble. The worst of it is that God Himself will pour out His wrath on this world (Zeph. 3:8; Rev. 6:17; 15:1). In Matthew 24:21 our Lord describes those final judgments as "great tribulation" (KJV). In Reve-

¹ This paper grew from an appendix to my writing "The Coming of Jesus' Eternal Kingdom According to the Book of Revelation." Both writings are designed for my website, www.kingdominbible.com.

lation 7 John sees the “great multitude that no one could count, from every nation...wearing white robes...come out of the great tribulation” (Rev. 7:9, 14). The Matthew 24 and Revelation 7 passages refer specifically to the final ordeal.²

Will believers during the Great Tribulation be the church? We have just been reminded (a) that all believers in Jesus can expect tribulation and (b) that many of them—including a “great multitude”—will pass through the final “Great Tribulation” before the kingdom comes. Will those in that Tribulation be members of the true “church [*ekklesia*], which is his [Messiah’s] body” (Eph. 1:22-23)? Dispensationalists say no.³ They insist that all members of the true church will miss that Tribulation because they will previously be raptured and removed from the earth. That is how some of them, if not all, understand His promise, “I will...keep you from the hour of trial” (Rev. 3:10). A whole series of fictional books assure us that such believers will not be “left behind” to suffer. That teaching is called “the Pretribulation Rapture.”⁴ Many who so believe consider it their “blessed hope,” an expression they take from Titus 2:13 (which we will study later). Their teaching certainly is comforting, but we will test its accuracy. If we were to trust it but find it unreliable, that could result in crushing disappointment.

Rapture at the Lord’s Coming. The Rapture refers to God’s *snatching up* from the earth with eternal bodies both dead believers and living ones. In popular theology it also includes moving the snatched people on to heaven. It is usually assumed that the Rapture involves (a) a large group (b) of godly people, (c) both living and dead, (d) snatched up from earth (e) in glorified bodies, (f) to be transported bodily, not just in spirit, (g) to heaven. But—and this fact will startle some—no Scripture requires that the destination be heaven. The snatching-up part is clear, but the heaven part is not. Consider, as an example, the passage probably most quoted about this subject, written to the Thessalonians. The apostle Paul tells some of the things that

² Except for Revelation 3:10, all the passages quoted up to here use the same Greek word for tribulation (*thlipsis*). In these passages the New International Version translates *thlipsis* differently each time. In John 16:33b, as “trouble”; in Acts 14:22b (plural), as “many hardships”; in Matthew 24:21, as “great distress”; and in Revelation 7:14, as “great tribulation.”

³ Probably all Bible students become aware of “dispensations” (different administrations of God’s grace) in Bible history. But here I use the term “Dispensationalist” for one who follows the whole system so-called. There are others who agree with them that the church will miss the Tribulation, yet do not carefully integrate that belief into their theology.

Raised as a Dispensationalist, I was often reminded to “rightly divide” the Bible. With minor differences my teachers proposed a framework by which to interpret it. That framework purported to show God’s evolving revelations to and tests of mankind. I highly respect such teachers. Most of them are diligent Bible students, earnest and loving. They have founded many Bible schools and missionary enterprises. Among their admirable beliefs: (a) The Bible should usually be interpreted literally; (b) Salvation has always been by grace through faith; (c) God will fulfill His promises to the nation Israel. However, they are zealous to keep Israel and the church separate in too many aspects. This leads them to limit “pure church truth” to their understanding of certain books. They tend to discredit as “Jewish” other books—such as, the Gospel of Matthew. My first important doctrinal differences with them began on the subject of the kingdom. I realized that the church’s final goal will be the same as Israel’s: not heaven away from earth but the Lord’s eternal kingdom on earth.

⁴ Dispensationalists know that the term *pretribulation* is not technically accurate here, but a simplification. It counts as the Great Tribulation (Dan. 9:26-27) Daniel’s entire Seventieth Week (of years) whereas it is only the last half of it.

will happen “at the coming [Greek *parousia*] of the Lord...[when] the Lord himself will come down from heaven” (1 Thess. 4:15-16a). Both living and dead believers, he says, “will be caught up [that is, raptured] together...to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever” (vv. 16b-18). “With the Lord” could mean in heaven or could mean on earth. It doesn’t say which.

Many current hymns and sermons have brainwashed us. They wrongly imply that our eternal goal is heaven **in contrast to earth**. Instead, the Bible locates eternal life in “heaven” **on earth**. Scores of prophecies picture Messiah’s coming kingdom on a renewed earth. In the final prophecy John saw “the Holy City, Jerusalem, **coming down out of heaven**” to that new earth (Rev. 21:10b). From that city on earth, our Lord “will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:33). So God will not give up on a material world and material bodies. Instead, He will renew them. And whether we go to heaven temporarily or not, we are destined to rule with Him on that renewed earth. This is only one of the important issues we must touch on as we discuss the relative timing of the Rapture.

Remember how the term Rapture is used in this paper. It accepts the fact that Jesus will come and give eternal bodies to all believers, dead and living. He will snatch them up together to be with Him forever. But using the term does not imply when the Lord will come or where those raptured will go, which things we will investigate.

The Rapture and the Parousia

The purpose and time of the *parousia* according to Matthew 24. (Don’t give up already just because we must deal with this key Greek term.) Our first consideration about the Rapture is its occasion, which 1 Thessalonians 4:15 calls “the **coming** of the Lord.” The Greek word is *parousia* (usually pronounced “pah-ru-SEE ah”), which often referred to the public coming of a high official, such as a king. Although important, the term itself is rare in the first 70% of the New Testament. In all four Gospels, Acts, Romans, and most of 1 Corinthians, it is used in only one chapter, Matthew 24. In that chapter it is found four times (vv. 3, 27, 37, 39). There it clearly refers to a promise Jesus often reiterates, in equivalent terms, in the context of that chapter and elsewhere. He promises to come again, publicly and in glory, in order to initiate His rule over the earth (e.g., Matt. 16:27-28; 19:28; 25:31; Luke 19:12, 15). Matthew 24 also clearly gives the relative time for His *parousia*—after the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:21).⁵ The term is not used again for Him until 1 Corinthians 15 and other Epistles. It is so used, for example, six times in the Thessalonian Epistles (1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1, 8). In those Epistles the likely meaning, unless clearly changed, would be the same as in Matthew.

⁵ The whole Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24-25) was triggered by Jesus’ predictions of the destruction of Jerusalem (24:2) and of His coming to rule (23:39). His disciples asked Him “when will this [destruction] happen, and what will be the sign of your coming [*parousia*] and of the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3). His answer warned them that only after the “abomination of desolation” and the “great distress” will “the coming [*parousia*] of the Son of Man” take place (24:15-28). When it does, “all the nations of the earth...will see the Son of Man coming [*erchomenon*] on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” (24:30-31).

Some posit two *parousias* or two stages. Although Matthew 24 has the *parousia* after the Tribulation, Dispensationalists tell us that the truth is more complicated. Sometimes in the Epistles, they say, the term means an earlier coming, or an earlier “stage” of the same coming, before the Tribulation.⁶ That is the case, they say, in passages about the Rapture. All Rapture passages affirm or imply the Lord’s Coming (using *parousia* or its equivalent). But if a passage clearly points to the beginning of His kingdom, Dispensationalists deny that it is a Rapture passage.⁷ As a result, using my labels, they have *parousia* passages of two kinds: Parousia/Rapture passages and Parousia/Second Coming (kingdom) passages. Look at their reasoning in Chart A, which follows. See also the appendix, “The Two *Parousia* Theory.”

CHART A	
Basis of Two <i>Parousia</i> Theory	
<i>Parousia</i> is a Greek technical term for the Lord’s Second Coming. Here is Dispensationalist thinking that leads them to classify <i>parousia</i> (or equivalent) passages as two events or two stages of one event.	
<i>Parousia</i> “Rapture” Passages	<i>Parousia</i> “Second Coming” Passages
They classify these passages as Rapture because the Rapture is expressed or implied and the <i>parousia</i> result is not clearly the kingdom.	They classify these passages as Second Coming because the Rapture is not clearly expressed or implied and the <i>parousia</i> result is clearly the kingdom.
Time: They conclude that the Rapture (expressed or implied) is imminent and before the Tribulation because no signs are specified.	Time: They conclude that this <i>parousia</i> takes place after the Tribulation, is not imminent, and has no Rapture because there are signs but no clear Rapture.
Example using <i>parousia</i> : 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18	Examples using <i>parousia</i> : Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39

One passage that qualifies as “Rapture” in their theory is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. They read nothing there about signs or the kingdom. Therefore, they assume that its *parousia* (the Lord’s coming) must be pretribulational and the kingdom not its goal. However, their explanation of this passage seems to have the following defects.

- Their explanation gives a meaning to the *parousia* contrary to what the Lord had given in the Gospels (Matt. 24).

⁶ Considering the term *parousia* ambiguous in the New Testament, many Dispensationalist teachers rarely use it for the Lord’s Coming. Those who do use it try to keep it singular, as the Scriptures do. That is, they tend to speak not of two *parousias* but of two stages of the same one. However they state it, their result is the same. If they are right, the Lord pointed to one event which their theology and interpretation of certain passages have divided into two. Could that be analogous to the Old Testament prophets’ picturing Messiah’s advent as one, which we now know is two? Only if the evidence for such division is unmistakable in the completed Scriptures.

⁷ Dispensationalists use strict criteria for distinguishing “Rapture” passages from “Second Coming” (kingdom) passages. No *parousia* passage implies the Rapture, they say, if it speaks of (a) observable signs to watch for, (b) public display of the Lord’s glory, or (c) its purpose being for the Lord to rule in His kingdom on earth. These criteria do not result from inductive study but from theology. We will consider their validity.

- Their explanation mistakes Paul’s subject in his next paragraph—and thus the time factor. They suppose that in 5:1-11 he deals with the Rapture. Instead (as I will show later), he deals with the Day of the Lord, during which the Rapture will take place.
- Their explanation merely assumes that the Lord will go back to heaven taking the snatched-up believers. The passage says only that we will remain with Him. Rather than His escorting us to heaven, we could accompany Him to earth. That is the way the same verb for *meet* is used in Acts.

The brothers [in Rome] had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns **to meet** us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged. When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself.... (Acts 28:15-16)

We could do just as those “brothers” did. They left Rome to meet Paul and accompany him into Rome. Likewise, we could leave the earth to meet the Lord in the air and immediately accompany Him to earth. In that case, His *parousia* in 1 Thessalonians 4 would still mean coming to rule, as it does in Matthew. Should we assume instead, in 1 Thessalonians 4, that the Lord will turn around and go back to heaven? It does not say so.

First Corinthians 15 is not ambiguous about purpose or time for the *parousia*. Parts of 1 Corinthians 15 are parallel to 1 Thessalonians 4 because they combine the *parousia* with the resurrection. In other words, each passage says that the Lord will both come and raise our bodies in glory. In fact, the glorification of our bodies is absolutely essential to the Rapture. But contrary to the Two-*Parousia* theory, 1 Corinthians 15 also locates this Rapture at the kingdom’s installation. Read the verses quoted next, in which both the purpose and relative time of the *parousia* seem clear. These verses show in three stages (here listed and bolded) the Lord’s victory over death. The Rapture/resurrection of believers is at the second stage.

For as in Adam all die, so in Messiah all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn:

1. **Messiah**, the firstfruits;
2. **then**, when he comes [Greek, “*epeita*, at His *parousia*”], those who belong to him.
3. 24 **Then** [*eita*] the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Cor. 15:22-26)

So 1 Corinthians 15 states that Messiah’s people “will be made alive” when He comes, which coming begins His reign. In other words, the Rapture will take place at the Second Coming. That is appropriate for a reason the chapter discusses at the end: We need eternal, glorified bodies in which to receive our eternal inheritance in the new world. “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.... We will all be changed—in a flash....” (vv. 50-55). Notice two ways in which these last verses are like verse 23: (a) They clearly speak of the same instantaneous transformation/resurrection. (b) They clearly take place at the Lord’s coming (though they do not mention it). In other words, both passages (15:23 and 50-55) have to do with the Rapture at the *parousia*. Dispensationalists

admit as much in the latter passage (though they miss the relevance of v. 50). But they usually deny that verse 23 refers to the Rapture, because it inaugurates His reign. See “The Two *Parousia* Theory” appendix at the end.

Does John 14:1-3 clearly indicate the time or destination of the Rapture? Many prefer to interpret 1 Thessalonians 4 based not on 1 Corinthians 15 but on John 14:1-3. The verses in John record a unique promise in the Gospels. In them the Lord promised to come **for us** without referring to His earlier promises to come rule. Many assume that He also promised on this occasion to remove us to heaven. He had just referred to “my Father’s house” with its “many rooms”—now in heaven. He was about to “go and prepare a place for you” (v. 2). After that, He said, He would “come back and take you to be with me” (v. 3). “Take you” is obviously a Rapture, a snatching up. Its goal, according to this verse, is for us to be with Him.⁸ But where will He be? Will He return to the place, just mentioned, that He will have prepared for us? In other words, will He take us right to heaven to occupy that place? Or will He stay on earth to rule?

The answer is not as obvious as many assume.

Probably all conservative interpreters agree that John 14 predicts the Rapture. But not all think that our removal from earth is clear there. For example, consider the admission by John F. Walvoord, a foremost Dispensationalist and champion of the Pretribulation Rapture. Walvoord admits that Jesus’ disciples probably could not understand a removal from earth in John 14! I quote Walvoord in the following paragraphs from my course on First and Second Thessalonians:⁹

John Walvoord finds no Rapture at all in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John 1-13. Jesus’ “first mention of the Rapture” (p. 109) was in John 14:1-3—on the night before His death. But even that mention was unclear, says Walvoord, because the disciples still did not understand that He would leave them and return. To the extent that they understood His departure, they believed that the Rapture “was a part of the promise to come to earth a second time.” In other words, they saw no distinction between the Rapture and the Second Coming. Walvoord cites no other passage in John or Acts in which such a distinction was made.

When, then, was the separate Rapture explained? “Much later Paul was converted, and God revealed the doctrine of the Rapture to him....Apparently he introduced the doctrine of the Rapture to the Thessalonians....to them, he explained the Rapture at length” (p. 110). Thus Walvoord believes that the first clear written explanations of the Rapture were in the two [Thessalonian] epistles you are studying.

⁸ The Greek phrase translated “take you to be with me” in John 14:3 is *paralepsomai humas pros emauton*. It literally means: “take-you-alongside unto myself,” not “take you away.”

⁹ My course on the Thessalonian Epistles is available at my website, www.kingdominbible.com. John F. Walvoord’s quotations here are from one of his last books: *Prophecy: 14 Essential Keys to Understanding the Final Drama* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993).

So even Walvoord accepts the fact that John 14:1-3 is ambiguous about time and destination. It describes the Rapture but does not clearly designate it as a separate event. To the disciples it was “a part of the promise to come to earth a second time.” But Walvoord cannot accept that the disciples were right. To him the Rapture is separate from the Second Coming, a meaning that Jesus’ disciples could not get. How, then, would they interpret His promise to “take you to be with me”? Simply as to “take you from wherever you are in order to stay with Me wherever I am.” Not to take you away to heaven but to keep you with Me as I reign. Consider the possibility that the disciples—rather than Dispensationalists—were right. In that case, how could such disciples live in the heavenly dwellings Jesus has prepared? The “Father’s house” would have to descend to earth. And so it will, as Revelation 21 predicts.¹⁰

Two comings in Titus 2:13? Dispensationalists believe, in effect, that there will be a coming (*parousia*) of Messiah at each end of the Tribulation. Do they cite a Scripture that shows such an arrangement? No, Walvoord admits that “no biblical passage states precisely when the Rapture will occur in relation to the Tribulation or the Second Coming” (p. 112). Yet, he assumes that there are two comings mentioned side by side in Titus 2:13 (KJV): “**that blessed hope and the glorious appearing** of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” He agrees with all other interpreters that the “glorious appearing” means the Lord’s Second Coming to reign. But he thinks that “the blessed hope” refers specifically to the Rapture as distinct and earlier.

There is a better interpretation reflected in the NIV translation: “We wait for **the blessed hope—the glorious appearing** of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” In other words, the “hope” and the “appearing” both refer to the same thing, the Lord’s one coming to rule. That translation is justified by the Greek.¹¹ Interpreted that way, Titus 2:13 does not specifically mention the Rapture at all! The Christian hope is not for us to escape from the world but for the Lord to come and reign. Many passages have the same teaching about the great day when He appears in glory.¹²

Romans 8:16-25 considers our hope to be our resurrection. In powerful paragraphs, Romans 8 exalts our hope from a similar perspective. As “God’s children...we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Messiah” (8:16-17). Even “the creation itself will be liberated” (8:21) when we receive “our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved” (8:23b-24a). So what is our hope according to Romans 8? To be transformed in order to fully

¹⁰ In this present age we are citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20-21). We are “aliens and strangers in the world” (1 Pet. 2:11). We do not “love the world or anything in the world...The world and its desires pass away” (1 John 2:15, 17). However, our relationship to earth will be different after Jesus comes. The Bible story, the story of redemption, guarantees “a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13).

¹¹ In Titus 2:13 a single Greek article ties together as one thing the nouns *hope* and *appearing* (*ten makarian elpida kai epiphaneian tes dokses*). If they were separate things, each would probably have its own article.

¹² What reason does Walvoord give for keeping the two expressions separate in Titus 2:13? His reason is interesting: “a rapture climaxing a tribulation is hardly a blessed hope” (p. 114). That reason betrays the Dispensationalist attitude that the church is superior to other saints. Walvoord knows that many saints will go through the Tribulation. He knows that they will indeed be rescued or resurrected at Messiah’s “glorious appearing” at the end of the Tribulation. But he denies that that could be a “blessed hope” for them!

participate in (inherit) the eternal kingdom the Lord will bring (see 1 Cor. 15:50). In Titus 2 it is His coming to bring that kingdom. In neither passage is our hope a Rapture that takes us away.

Does Revelation Resolve the Rapture Riddle?

We have seen a limitation of the best-known descriptions of the Rapture, in John 14 and 1 Thessalonians 4. They do not definitely indicate the time of the Rapture (such as, before or after the Great Tribulation) nor its destination. The *parousia* in those passages could be interpreted as the same event as in Matthew 24. But we would expect the Book of Revelation to resolve this question. That book is written for the churches (as chapters 1-3 and 22 repeatedly declare), and it describes the Tribulation in detail (see chapters 4-19). A Rapture and removal of millions of believers would be of major interest both to the church and the world. What a huge deliverance! There could be few things more important to include in the book. If it is there, we should find it before chapter 4. After that, we should not see the church on earth in chapters 4-19.

Church by that name is missing. Well, the word *church* (*ekklesia*) is not even used in Revelation chapters 4-21! The word is not found, singular or plural, after chapter 3 until the last chapter. Does that prove that the church itself is absent from the events of those chapters? No, it does not. Several New Testament books written for the church or churches do not have that term at all. It is missing from all the Gospels except Matthew, also from 2 Timothy, Titus, 2 Peter, 1 John, and 2 John. Yet, all those books are for the church!

But the church can be present by other names. We should determine whether that is the case in the chapters giving details about the Tribulation, Revelation 4-19. First, consider some evidence in chapter 19, at the end of the Tribulation chapters. The Lamb's "bride," generally thought to be or include the church, is ready for marriage. "His bride has made herself ready....Fine linen was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)" (Rev. 19:7-8). When did she/they get ready for the wedding? The same paragraph gives an outstanding example of such saints who got ready and showed righteousness. It twice refers to His "servants" (vv. 2, 5), who include the Tribulation martyrs: "He has condemned the great prostitute [and] avenged on her the blood of his servants" (v. 2). Apparently these are the same "servants" who had asked for vengeance during the Tribulation (6:9-11). Finally they had received it and become part of the Lamb's bride. Does their presence not suggest a late- or even post-tribulation Rapture?

Many witnesses. As a matter of fact, we find true believers on earth in many passages in Revelation that refer to the Tribulation. At least some, who just came from earth, are now dressed in robes washed "white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:13-14; see also 6:9-11).¹³ At least some are called "saints" (13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24). At least some will "die in the Lord"

¹³ We could have started with God's "servants," the "144,000 from all the tribes of Israel" (Rev. 7:3-8). It later says that "they follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb....They are blameless" (14:3-5). But since they are all from Israel during the Tribulation, Dispensationalists would automatically disqualify them from being part of the church.

(14:13). At least some, God calls “my people” (18:4). At least some are Tribulation martyrs who “had been beheaded” under the beast but later “came to life and reigned with Messiah” (20:4). Why should not all these people belong to the church? Surely Messiah will give them all the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9) and include them in the new covenant.¹⁴ And that baptism by Messiah—not the use of a certain term—is how He builds His body, the church (1 Cor. 12:12-13).¹⁵ In other words, if they are given the Holy Spirit, they are in the church.

Inferences some make that the church is removed. As just seen, one cannot disprove the presence of the church on earth after Revelation 3. Many godly people appear in those chapters who seem to be qualified. Nevertheless, Dispensationalists insist that the church has been raptured and removed to heaven before chapter 4. Can they give chapter and verse for the event? No, they cannot. There is no direct evidence there or anywhere else in the book!¹⁶ No mention of a Rapture that will supposedly take all of God’s people away. Such utter silence would be hard to explain if the Rapture were really separate from the Lord’s coming to rule.¹⁷ But the separate Rapture as Dispensationalists picture it is nowhere in Revelation. Therefore, they must rely there on inferences such as the following.

¹⁴ The Holy Spirit is given to every believer under the new, eternal covenant. “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). This will be true for everyone who attains immortality (Rom. 2:7) and an eternal inheritance, in other words, for every true believer.

¹⁵ Messiah Jesus’ **pouring out the Spirit** and **baptizing in the Spirit** are not two activities but one. He now does this for every believer. All the Gospels (e.g., Matt. 3:11) record the promise—eventually to be fulfilled—that He would do this for Israel. So does Acts 1:4-5, where Jesus also calls it “the gift my Father promised.” It was first given on the Day of Pentecost. God poured out His Spirit (Acts 2:17, 18) through Jesus (2:33) and promised the same gift to others who would believe (2:38). So the promised gift and baptism were received when the Spirit was “poured out.” Some time later (Acts 10:44-47) Peter saw the same thing happen to Gentiles at Caesarea. Recalling that experience, he said that they had received the same “gift” and baptism as at Pentecost.

“The Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be **baptized** with the Holy Spirit.’ So if God gave them the same **gift** as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Messiah, who was I to think that I could oppose God?” (Acts 11:15-17)

¹⁶ Various Scriptures assure us that God’s people will be gathered/snatched up (raptured) to be with the Lord. But that does not justify all the elements in the usual current definition, which is faulty. Neither Revelation nor any other Scripture combines all these: (a) a large group (b) of godly people, (c) both living and dead, (d) are snatched up from earth (e) in glorified bodies (f) to be transported bodily, not just in spirit, (g) to heaven. However, some of those aspects are fulfilled in the cases of the Two Witnesses (11:12), the child “who will rule all the nations” (12:5), those who are reaped in the ripe harvest (14:16), and the victors over the beast by “the sea of glass” in heaven (15:1-4). All the participants in the “first resurrection” (20:4-6) would qualify, although those mentioned do not go to heaven.

¹⁷ If the Rapture were separate from the Lord’s coming to rule, its independent importance would be emphasized in Scripture. But if the two events are simultaneous, the Rapture is subsidiary and its mention is optional. Accordingly, Matthew 19:28-29 predicts the Second Coming but does not specifically mention the Rapture. That does not imply that the Rapture will be at a different time; in fact, the “renewal of all things” includes it. But it is not mentioned because the emphasis is on the greater whole. Matthew 13:30, 40-43, however, does mention it as one of the two gatherings. The angels will gather the “weeds” first, then the “wheat,” which “will shine like the sun in the kingdom....” Bringing together the saints on earth to gloriously shine in the kingdom fits the main description of the Rapture. Matthew 24:30-31 also refers to the same separate gathering. At the Lord’s coming (*parousia*) after the Tribulation, the angels “gather his elect.”

- They infer that the twenty-four elders of Revelation 4 represent the total church, which by then, they say, will be in heaven. They argue that the elders (a) are human beings, not angels, (b) probably represent only the church,¹⁸ and (c) represent the church as wholly raptured and removed from the earth.¹⁹
BUT even if these are all representative redeemed ones, how does that prove that all those they represent are in heaven? How do their number, presence in heaven, or activities distinguish them in some essential way from all the other redeemed ones on earth during Revelation 6-18?
- They infer that Revelation 3:10 requires Rapture and removal before the Tribulation. There the Lord promises the Philadelphia church to “keep you from the hour of trial...” They usually argue (a) that the Philadelphia church represents the entire true church; (b) that to “keep from” (*tereso ek*) that hour requires rapturing and removing them rather than just guarding them through it; and (c) that “the hour of trial” includes everything under that time period. BUT the meaning of this verb for *keep* with the preposition *ek*²⁰ is seen in its only other such use in the New Testament. In John 17:15 the Son prays that the Father would “protect them from the evil one,” not to escape all contact with him but to avoid lasting harm. The promise has a similar meaning in Revelation 3:10, to bring them safely out from the time of trial, not keep them away from it.
- Some infer the Rapture and removal from the last words of Revelation 4:1: “**Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.**”²¹
BUT this invitation and promise to the apostle John were immediately fulfilled. He immediately went “in the Spirit” into heaven—and saw future events we are still waiting for. What evidence, aside from one’s theological system, is there for reading this as a statement or symbol of the Rapture?

Such arguments are not required if the Rapture involves only the resurrection/glorification of saints and their gathering to Jesus (as in Rev. 20). But they are required if the Rapture includes a

¹⁸ W.A. Criswell believes that the elders represent all “the redeemed of humanity” raptured and taken to heaven. But he then opines that the twenty-four combine two groups, which separate after they are last mentioned in Revelation 19. “I think those four and twenty elders divide. I think the twelve representing the church of Christ are married to the Lamb. That is His church, the Bride of Christ. I think the other twelve represent the saints of the old dispensation...those who are called to the marriage supper of our Christ, such as John the Baptist.” *Expository Sermons on Revelation, Five Volumes Complete & Unabridged in One* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), Vol. 3, pp. 30-40.

¹⁹ See Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), pp. 469-471. McClain uses four arguments to prove that the twenty-four elders are representative human beings rather than angels. He considers their thrones (but see Daniel 10:13), their white raiment (but see John 20:12), and their crowns of gold (but see Rev. 6:2; 9:7). His best argument that they are human, though it opposes the current Greek critical text, is their new song in Revelation 5:9-10. They “speak of *themselves* with the redeemed in verse 9, whereas in verse 10 they speak objectively of the Church *as its representatives*, which they are in chapters 4 and 5.” But McClain merely assumes that those they represent are all raptured.

²⁰ Greek *ek*, as illustrated several times in Revelation 7:4-9, usually indicates separation **from within** an entity.

²¹ They argue that the situation must change completely after the expression “after this.” Not so. Check all nine times the Greek expression (*meta tauta*) is used in Revelation: 1:19; 4:1, 2; 7:9; 9:12; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1; and 20:8. Usually it simply moves to the next event with no suggestion about the situation just described.

pretribulational removal from earth. Although there are godly teachers who count on such arguments, their conclusions are purely inferences and need far better support. We will now consider two of their arguments from other books.

The Argument Claiming Absolute Imminence

Promises to return and rule after signs take place. There were many witnesses to our Lord's miracles. In them He showed that He can transform this earth into the Paradise predicted by the prophets. He foresaw that He would be rejected and go away, leaving behind His apostles, who would become the foundation of the church. He also solemnly promised to come back and rule the earth with them. "At the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne," He said, "you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones..." (Matt. 19:28). Previous to that Second Coming, He predicted, certain events must take place first. Those signs include events of the Great Tribulation.²² Therefore, His Second Coming is not absolutely imminent—it will not happen at just any time. Those who watch for the signs and see them occur, will not be surprised on that day. But to those who "sleep" through the signs, the coming will indeed be imminent.

Do some passages teach an earlier, imminent Rapture? Dispensationalists insist that the Rapture will take place even earlier, with absolutely no signs. Long before He comes to rule, He will come for the church. At any time. After no predicted events. With absolute imminence. Wayne Brindle claims that the seven following passages teach such imminence:²³

John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 5:4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:7; Titus 2:13; 1 John 3:2-3; and Revelation 22:7, 12, 20.

We have looked at John 14 and Titus 2 already. We found that in John 14 both the time and the destination are ambiguous. Titus 2:13 does not specifically refer to the Rapture at all. Neither do the three verses in Revelation 22, where the Lord promises, "I am coming soon." To prove absolute imminence there, His promise would have to imply our Rapture without implying His reigning. But it implies both, as we see by comparing His same promise of soon coming in Revelation 1:3, 7. So now we will mainly consider the Thessalonian passages.

First Thessalonians 1:9-10. Possibly all commentators realize that this passage describes genuine conversion. It was the response of the Thessalonians to the gospel. They had "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven...who rescues us from the coming wrath." Believers will escape God's wrath. Dispensationalists understand this to be the wrath God will pour out in the Tribulation (Rev. 6:16-17; 16:1, 19; 19:15). Their view is based on their interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 5:9, which we will consider next: "God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Messiah." But

²² Reread what I said under "The purpose and time of the *parousia* according to Matthew 24."

²³ Wayne A. Brindle, "Biblical Evidence for the Imminence of the Rapture," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (April-June 2001): 138-51.

neither in 1:10 or 5:9 does “wrath” refer mainly, if at all, to the Tribulation. In 1:9-10, for example, Paul reports the Thessalonians’ response to the gospel. What gospel? There is no need to guess; it is often summarized in the Book of Acts (for the Thessalonians in Acts 17:1-3). None of those summaries includes teaching about the Tribulation. Therefore, the “wrath” must be final wrath and punishment, as, for example, in Matthew 3:7; Luke 3:7; Romans 2:5-11; 5:9-10; Ephesians 5:6; and Colossians 3:6 (cf. Heb. 10:26-31).

Dispensationalists add another argument for imminence in 1 Thessalonians 1: that believers wait for the Son Himself rather than for signs. But God’s people always wait for Him, regardless of what must happen before He delivers them (Isa. 26:8; 40:31).

First Thessalonians 5:1-11 and the Day of the Lord. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 the apostle Paul has assured us that dead believers will not miss God’s blessings. When our Lord comes (literally, “at the *parousia* of the Lord”) and raptures us, He will raise them first. But in 5:1-11 Paul no longer mentions the Lord’s coming or the Rapture. His changed but related subject is the coming of “the Day of the Lord.” Prominent in the Old Testament, that Day is quite familiar to Bible students. To start his discussion here of its coming, Paul first reminds them that God has not revealed its “times and dates” (v. 1). This echoes Jesus’ answer, using the same terms, in Acts 1:7. (The disciples had asked about a major feature of that Day.) Accordingly, Paul continues,

...you know very well that **the day of the Lord** will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. (1 Thess. 5:2-3)

So the “Day of the Lord,” key to Paul’s new topic, will come unexpectedly. At least for those who anticipate “peace and safety” instead, it is imminent. What is it? Its meaning is well-established in Old Testament Scriptures: It is the period of God’s final triumph. It will include the judgments inaugurating His kingdom—and also the glory of that kingdom. In other words, the Day of the Lord (a) begins with Tribulation darkness, in which He punishes and removes His enemies (Zeph. 1:14-18; Isa. 2:12-21); and (b) continues with the brightness of His eternal rule (Isa. 2:11, 17). See Chart C on page 19. The following passage from Zechariah includes both aspects—the darkness and the brightness. It also adds the King’s coming, not before that Day starts but after that Day is well underway.

A day of the Lord is coming....I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it....Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations....On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem....Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him....[Then] the Lord will be king over the whole earth....Then the survivors from all the nations...will go up year after year...to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty. (Zech. 14:1-5, 9a, 16-17)

Thus will be the Day of the Lord according to Old Testament prophets. The divine King will conquer His enemies and come to rule. Does the New Testament change that meaning? No, it

does not.²⁴ Does that Day really concern believers in the church? Yes, it does. It is referred to as our hope several times, by the same name and other names.²⁵ Read some examples.

- Our Lord refers to it as “His day” and “the day the Son of Man is revealed” (Luke 17:24, 30).
- Accordingly, Paul tells the Corinthians that we “wait for our Lord Jesus Messiah to be revealed.” We count on His keeping us strong so as to “be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Messiah” (1 Cor. 1:7-8).
- Again, Paul reminds the Corinthians that we count on having our “spirit saved on the day of the Lord” (1 Cor. 5:5).
- In his final letter Peter relates that Day to the “coming [*parousia*] he [the Lord] promised” (2 Peter 3:3-4). Using the same language that Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 5:2, Peter speaks of “the day of the Lord, [which] will come like a thief” (2 Peter 3:10).
- So well known was the expression that it was just called “the Day” (1 Cor. 3:13; Heb. 10:25). The term would have been confusing if it had more than one meaning.

In the rest of 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, Paul warns believers not to be caught unawares by that Day. They should watch for it and will be saved in it. They do not belong to the world’s darkness, in which the world sleeps and is drunk (vv. 4-7). Believers do not expect God’s wrath but His salvation (vv. 8-9). What is this “hope of salvation” that protects their heads? “Hope” is always confidence in something future (Rom. 8:24). Therefore, this salvation is not initial justification but the coming completed redemption. (See my later discussion of the parallel passage, Romans 5:1-11.) And seeing that this hope is linked to faith and love (1 Thess. 5:8), it is essential for every believer. Not just physical rescue for some from a brief Tribulation but full salvation even for Tribulation saints (Matt. 19:24-25; Rom. 13:11; Heb. 1:14; 2:3, 5). Since the Day of the Lord includes the kingdom itself, it is salvation **in** that Day, not **from** that Day.

In short, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 does not specifically deal with the Lord’s coming or our Rapture. Its concern is something earlier, the beginning of the Day of the Lord. That Day will come when least expected. Since we do not know when that will be, we must not sleep but “be alert and self-controlled” (v. 6). We should remember that we will not be objects of God’s eternal wrath but recipients of His eternal salvation.

Though not mentioned in this passage, the Lord’s *parousia* and our Rapture will take place during that Day of the Lord. According to various prophecies, that Day will be well advanced before He comes. He will have poured out enough of His wrath to make His triumph secure (as seen in Revelation chapters 16-19). Then He will come to rapture His elect people and rule over

²⁴ Biblical expressions should be interpreted according to their usage in Scripture, not according to modern theology. Be loath to redefine an often-used expression just because some “expert” says to do so. An outstanding term often redefined wrongly is “the kingdom of God” (or the Jewish equivalent, “the kingdom of heaven”). Be aware too that the New Testament sometimes makes special application of an Old Testament passage without denying its original meaning.

²⁵ Some affirm that “the Day of the Lord” should be distinguished in the New Testament from “the Day of Christ (Messiah).” That distinction would be hard to prove. Both expressions are sometimes combined (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:8), and Jesus is both Lord and Christ.

the earth (as seen in Rev. 19:11 to 20:6). If the order were reversed—that is, if the Rapture had to come first—Paul would surely have said so.

Dispensationalists understand 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 differently. They assume that the main point of this passage—and what they consider to be the Christian hope—is something not even mentioned. It is a special coming of the Lord and our Rapture before the Day of the Lord starts. Not His glorious victory but our escape from the Tribulation.²⁶ Convinced of this, Brindle argues from this passage for the imminence of that (unmentioned) coming and Rapture. It could take place at any time. If it were preceded by signs instead, he says, it would surprise no one. If it followed a Tribulation, the apostle would not warn to avoid that “this day should surprise you like a thief” (v. 4).²⁷

Accordingly, Brindle concludes (a) that the wrath we will escape (v. 9) is God’s wrath in the Tribulation and (b) that the salvation we expect (vv. 8, 9) is to escape that ordeal. That makes the salvation only physical, not spiritual, and unavailable to Tribulation saints.²⁸ Neither of these conclusions is likely. Compare also the parallel promise in Matthew 10:22b: “he who stands firm until the end will be saved.” Yet, many believers in that context will be persecuted to death (Matt. 10:21, 28, 39). Physical salvation makes no sense in either passage, since great numbers of faithful Tribulation saints will be killed.

²⁶ Dispensationalists agree with others that the Lord will come in glory after “the Day of the Lord” has begun. But they are so certain of an even earlier coming/Rapture that they insert it in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 and make it the main subject. Notice how Brindle misrepresents that introduction (see words I have bolded in the quotation that follows). He says that “the contrast between the ‘you’ of verses 1-2, 4-5, and the ‘they’ of verse 3 (‘they shall not escape’) strongly implies that the church *will* escape, and that is one reason Paul had no need to discuss the ‘times and epochs’ of the rapture (v. 1).” (Brindle, p. 145)

²⁷ The Dispensationalist argument would be more likely if the apostle (a) really dealt with the Rapture in this passage and (b) had taught the readers that the Rapture must precede the Day of the Lord. Since Brindle has those assumptions, he argues as follows:

That the “destruction” described in verse 3 is that of the Tribulation as a whole and not the “day of vengeance” accompanying Christ’s second coming (2 Thess. 1:7-9) or God’s later judgment of the lost (Rev. 20:11-15) is indicated by the fact that those who will suffer this destruction are quoted as saying, “Peace and safety,” just before the calamity suddenly and violently comes on them. It is unthinkable that near the end of the Tribulation or during the outpouring of heavenly signs (Rev. 6-19) or at the time of God’s final judgment people could be saying anything resembling “peace and safety.” (Brindle, p. 144)

Brindle is mistaken about what people fail to anticipate in this passage. It is not the Rapture but the Day of the Lord.

²⁸ Since he interprets “salvation” as physical here, Brindle would consider martyrdom a failure of the promise. He says,

But martyrdom cannot be thought of as delivery or “rescue” from the coming wrath. If the church finds itself in the Tribulation, then at least some believers will not be delivered, since they would be martyred. This seems contrary to the teaching of 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9, where no exceptions to the rescue are indicated or implied. (Brindle, p. 146)

But why does Brindle thus suppose that “salvation” in 5:8, 9 is physical? As indicated above, it cannot be physical in the parallel passage of Matthew 10:22. Also, Brindle’s understanding implies that many Tribulation saints will **not** be delivered. Why would they not?

We will now look at two passages with several parallels to 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.

Romans 5:1-11. “How much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath” (Rom. 5:9). This passage is clearly like 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 in two respects. (a) It speaks about our ultimate future without mentioning either the Lord’s coming or our Rapture.²⁹ (b) It promises future salvation from God’s wrath but does not specify what that wrath is. However, the passage deals with a subject not considered in 1 Thessalonians 5—that of suffering. The Romans passage is written so that we will “rejoice in our sufferings” (Rom. 5:3a). How can we? (a) By realizing that God designs to mature us through sufferings (vv. 3b-5) and (b) by recognizing that we are no longer His enemies but His friends (“reconciled,” vv. 6-11). It is at this point that Paul mentions salvation from wrath. “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Messiah died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be **saved from God’s wrath** through him” (vv. 8-9). It is evident that the Dispensationalist interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 5 is even less possible here. Since this passage is written to assure us **in sufferings**, it assuredly does not promise that we will avoid sufferings! We can expect sufferings before the triumph. But in both passages we are assured of ultimate salvation.

Second Peter 3:1-13. In his last epistle Peter says a lot about the Lord’s coming, calling it the *parousia* in 1:16 and 3:4. In both passages he clearly relates that coming to the Lord’s glory and kingdom.³⁰ In the last chapter he even calls its time the Day of the Lord.³¹ “In the last days scoffers will come,” he predicts. “They will say, ‘Where is this coming he promised?’” (2 Peter 3:3-4). He says that the scoffers “deliberately forget” the earlier worldwide judgment in the flood. The same divine word that brought that judgment will bring the next one, which God in patience is delaying (vv. 5-9). “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief” (v. 10). This is the same language about the same “Day” as Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 5:2. In that Day “everything will be destroyed” and will be replaced with “a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Peter 3:11-13).³² So in his last chapter (as earlier in the same epistle) it is evident that Peter sees the *parousia* as the Christian hope. But it is such only as a feature of the Day of the Lord, which opens up to the Lord’s righteous rule. When Dispensationalists see a passage featuring the ruling aspect, however, they assume it cannot include the Rapture. No

²⁹ Bible students tend to insert those events into each passage according to their own theology.

³⁰ In chapter 1 Peter challenges believers to “receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Messiah” (1 Peter 1:11). Peter’s continuing effort is to have believers remember “the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Messiah” (v. 16a). There was a foretaste of that “majesty...when we were with him on the sacred mountain” of Transfiguration (vv. 16a, 18). Three Gospels explain that event as (a preview of) “the Son of Man coming in his kingdom” (Matt. 16:28). Peter does not mention the Rapture in these contexts, not because it is absent but because it is quite secondary.

³¹ Peter goes beyond Paul in this regard. Paul discusses the *parousia* in 1 Thessalonians 4 and the beginning of the Day of the Lord in chapter 5. Peter discusses both together in 2 Peter 3.

³² On my website see my paper “A New Heaven and a New Earth.” I show that the millennium will be the first stage of the eternal kingdom, the new world. Our Lord located the *palingenesia* (the new birth of the world) immediately at His return. But it will take a thousand years to complete it (1 Cor. 15:24-25). The “destruction” of the present world will transform it, not obliterate it, as seen in the way similar hyperbolic language is used elsewhere in Scripture.

doubt Peter’s emphasis must seem strange to them. He says nothing about the Rapture, but only about the Lord’s coming in glory, as our hope.

Fatal objection? We have been considering the Dispensationalist argument about imminence based on their interpretations of Scriptures. Their argument depends mostly on how they understand 1 Thessalonians 5. Therefore, we have been looking at that passage and parallel passages in the Epistles. But there is another objection to their view that seems insurmountable. It regards the source of the apostolic words and thoughts Dispensationalists use to prove absolute imminence. That language comes right out of the Gospels, where, as everyone admits, it refers to the Second Coming in glory. That is the case, for example, with the figure of speech comparing the Lord’s coming to that of a thief. It is used in Luke 12:35-48 for the Second Coming (as also in Revelation 16:15, just before the last bowl of the Tribulation). Chart B lists language claimed to prove absolute imminence in 1 Thessalonians 5. It tells where the same language was used earlier in Matthew 24 for people who can experience the Tribulation. Is it reasonable that it would prove absolute imminence in the Epistle but not in the Gospel?³³

CHART B The Same Supposed “Imminence” Language in Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 5		
Matthew 24:36-51	1 Thessalonians 5:1-11	Figures/Words of Warning
vv. 42-44	vv. 2, 4	The Lord (or the Day of the Lord) will come like a thief.
vv. 38-39	vv. 3, 6-7	Godless people will continue their usual activities until too late.
vv. 42-43	vv. 6-8	Believers should keep watch and not suffer loss. (“Keep watch” is the verb <i>gregoreo</i> , used twice in each passage.)
v. 49	vv. 6-8	Those who stay sober are contrasted to those who get drunk.

Let us summarize regarding “imminence” language. Many Christians nowadays are told (a) that the Rapture will “come like a thief” but (b) that its coming would not be unexpected (a surprise) if the Tribulation had to take place first. On the contrary, (a) there is no passage in the Epistles that refers to the Lord’s coming and the Rapture as absolutely imminent, whereas (b) in the Gospels the Lord did describe as imminent His coming after the Tribulation!

Let us also summarize the lack of evidence for imminence in each of the passages in Brindle’s list:

³³ Chart B is limited to the Olivet Discourse as reported in Matthew. If we compared to Luke, we would see, for example, a special word for coming **suddenly** used only in Luke 21:34 and 1 Thessalonians 5:3.

- John 14:1-3. Promises the Lord's *parousia* and the gathering of believers but says nothing about the time of those events in relation to other end-time events.
- 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10. Summarizes the Thessalonian response to the gospel. Therefore, it favors "ultimate" meanings for *wrath* and *delivers*, which point to the Second Coming.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:4-9. Is part of a discussion of the beginning of the Day of the Lord—with no mention of the *parousia* and the Rapture. "Wrath" and "salvation" seem used in the "ultimate" sense applying to the Second Coming, not to the Tribulation and physical deliverance.
- 1 Corinthians 1:7. Mentions the Lord's coming as our expectation. His being "revealed" at that time, on "the day of the Lord" (v. 8), implies the glory and kingdom of His Second Coming.
- Titus 2:13. Does not refer specifically to the Rapture at all but only to the Second Coming as our "blessed hope."
- 1 John 3:2-3. The occasion is indicated by the same Greek words just used in 2:28 (for "when he appears"). Since that verse refers to the Second Coming *parousia* for public judgment, so does this.
- Revelation 22:7, 12, 20. These promise the Lord's soon coming but say nothing about rapturing or reigning. Why should they be different from the same promise in 1:3, 7, which implies reigning and therefore refers to the Second Coming?

The Argument about the Restrainer

Second Thessalonians 2:1-8. To bolster their cause, Dispensationalists present a unique explanation of this passage. Before critiquing their view, let us consider the apostle Paul's message to the Thessalonians in this epistle. In chapter 1 he greeted them and thanked God for their faith and love, and for their perseverance in trials (1:1-4). Your endurance, he said, will be evidence when the Lord comes to judge (1:5-10).

You will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God...God...will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God...with everlasting destruction...on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people....

The verses just quoted assure us (a) that persecution demonstrates the character of those who inflict it and those who suffer it, and (b) that payback time for both groups will be when the Lord comes in glory to judge. He will mete out trouble to some and relief to others. It is important to note that this judgment does not take place at death but at the Second Coming.

After a prayer (1:11-12) Paul proceeds in 2:1-12 to discuss a related question about that future. He clarifies the relative time of the one event he calls "the coming (*parousia*) of our Lord Jesus Messiah and our being gathered to him [our Rapture]" (2:1). There is no reason in the context to distinguish this *parousia* and Rapture from the glorious coming he has just discussed. In other words, "our being gathered to him" in 2:1 refers to the same as the "relief to you...and to us" in 1:7. As the apostle proceeds to discuss the time of that event, he follows the same order as he

did in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5. Having mentioned the *parousia* and Rapture first, he then relates it to the Day of the Lord. As in the first epistle, he assumes they know that the Lord will come during that Day, not before it. (The timing fits the post-tribulation *parousia* and gathering in Matthew 24.) Therefore, the Lord cannot come until that Day is well underway. That is why Paul begins by strongly denying “that the day of the Lord has already come....That day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed” (2 Thess. 2:2-3). Paul discusses those precursors through verse 8a before returning to the *parousia* itself in verse 8b.

In regard to the man of lawlessness, he says that the Thessalonian believers

know **what is holding him back**, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but **the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way**. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.” (2 Thess. 2: 6-8)

So the restrainer who or that is holding back lawlessness will leave the scene first. At that point the lawless one can be revealed and the Day of the Lord can begin. Well after it begins, Jesus can come and take charge. There have been many guesses at the identity of this restrainer. The Dispensationalist guess favors a Pretribulation Rapture. I will give their proposal in Charles C. Ryrie’s words as part of the following paragraphs quoted from my study of the Thessalonian Epistles.³⁴

“Most commentators identify the restrainer with the Roman Empire of Paul’s day, which held back evil by its advanced system of laws, many of which are still basic to legal systems in our day” (Ryrie, p. 109). This was the belief of the early Church Fathers, supported by Paul’s argument that God ordains governments to restrain evil (Rom. 13:1-7). Ryrie, however (p. 110), gives reasons against the Roman Empire view....

Nowadays, some commentators have a view not mentioned by the early Church Fathers: “The restrainer is God, and the instrument of restraint is the God-indwelt church” (Ryrie, p. 112). In this view the removal of the Restrainer will be the Rapture of the church. Then “the Day of the Lord...begins immediately after the Rapture” (Constable, p. 705) and will include the Seventieth Week for Israel and its Great Tribulation. This view is called the Pretribulation Rapture....If this is what Paul had taught the Thessalonians, how could some of them think that the Day of the Lord had come? Only, it seems, by forgetting that the Rapture must take place first—or not knowing what to think.

Remember that Paul is reminding the Thessalonians why the Day of the Lord could not have started yet. It is because a restrainer is still holding back earthly rebellion and lawlessness. Paul assumes that they know who the restrainer is and what his/its removal will mean. Ryrie identifies the restrainer as God through the church and the removal as the Rapture. But if Paul means

³⁴ Ryrie’s words are from his *First and Second Thessalonians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959). Thomas L. Constable’s words are from “2 Thessalonians,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty*, New Testament, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, Inc., 1983).

the Rapture, why not speak clearly? He is not trying to keep it a secret. He has just referred to the Lord’s coming (*parousia*) and the Rapture together in 2:1.³⁵ Ryrie interprets 2:5 to mean that Paul has already taught them the Pretribulation Rapture. If so, do they think it has taken place without them—and without Paul and his companions!? Not likely. In my Thessalonians study course I make a different proposal about the identity of the restrainer and add technical support (here merged).

It may be that “what is holding him back” (v. 6) simply refers to God’s purposes, and “the one who now holds it back” (v. 7b) is God. In that case—and in line with the Greek verb —“till he is taken out of the way” (v. 7c) would mean “till God steps aside.” The verb in “till he **is taken** out of the way” gives a wrong impression. The Greek is “*heos ek mesou genetai*.” This bolded verb is the normal one for “become” or “come to be.” It does not state what is done to the restraining influence but what it does. In other words, it does **not** say that the restraining influence is **taken** out of the midst but that it **comes to be** out of the midst. Thus, its removal could simply mean that God steps aside to let wickedness find full expression.

Understood this way, the restrainer’s removal is not the Rapture. Paul ties the Rapture only to the Lord’s *parousia*, specifically in 2:1 (the “relief” promised in 1:7) and implied in 2:8. That *parousia* and Rapture will take place only after God lets lawlessness come to its climax and the Day of the Lord begins with darkness. That time-frame perfectly fits His post-tribulation coming mentioned in Revelation 20 rather than an unmentioned coming before Revelation 4. Study Chart C, which is valid for 2 Thessalonians 2 and other passages.

CHART C The Day of the Lord & the Parousia (Coming) of the King 2 Thessalonians 2 (cf. Zech. 14)			
(End of Present Age)	T h e D a y o f t h e L o r d →		
The Restrainer stops restraining.	Messiah in heaven	The Parousia Messiah descends from heaven. ↓	[Light] THE KINGDOM OF GOD
The man of lawlessness is revealed.	[Darkness] Tribulation on earth	Messiah comes to earth to rule, raptures His church.	Messiah rules forever on the renewed earth. →

³⁵ Dispensational thinking understands the coming (*parousia*) in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 to be pretribulation only because it involves the Rapture. But reference to a pretrib coming in 2:1 would be confusing between two references to the Lord’s post-trib coming in glory. In the previous reference (1:5-10) He will come to judge everyone. He will “pay back” and “punish” the wicked but “give relief” to His saints and “be glorified” in them. In the subsequent reference (2:8), using the same term *parousia* as 2:1, He will destroy the lawless one.

The Argument about the Rebels

Let us first review some things we have studied. Nearly all believers, if not all, look for our Lord Messiah to return to earth to rule. Using the power He already demonstrated, He will then “restore everything” (Acts 3:21). All premillennialists, whether “pre-tribs” or “post-tribs,” agree that His kingdom will then start with the millennium. They also agree with the following facts about that particular coming and its sequel. The references are merely samples.

- Its timing: At the end of the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24; 2 Thess. 2; Rev. 19-20).
- Its name: Messiah’s *parousia*, as He called it four times in Matthew 24 (cf. 2 Thess. 2:8).
- Its character: Public, with power and great glory (2 Thess. 1).
- Its main purpose: For Him, along with His saints, to rule on earth (Rev. 20).
- Its immediate results: Messiah will defeat His enemies (Rev. 19:19 to 20:3), gather His elect ones from all over the world (Matt. 24:31), raise many dead believers (Rev. 20:4-6), judge many (Matt. 25; 2 Thess. 1), and inaugurate the millennium (Rev. 20).
- At the end of the millennium the devil will be released and lead a great rebellion (Rev. 20:7-10).

The post-tribulation Rapture view is diagramed in Chart D. It affirms that the *parousia* just mentioned above will be the only *parousia*. When Messiah comes in glory to rule, He will rapture the saints—that is, raise the dead ones and gather all saints, giving them glorified bodies.

CHART D			Post-tribulation Rapture View	
Affirming One Future Coming (<i>Parousia</i>) for the Lord				
The Present Age	Tribu- lation	↓ Coming to rapture and rule	T h e K i n g d o m	→ Millennium

The pretribulation Rapture view is diagramed in Chart E, which follows. It alleges that before His glorious coming the Lord will come back an additional time about seven years earlier. On that occasion, it says, He will rapture and remove the saints. At His later coming to rule, He will bring the saints back with Him. In the Epistles each of the alleged comings is sometimes called the *parousia*. However, Pretribulationists (for clarity’s sake?) usually distinguish them as “the Rapture” and “the Second Coming.”

CHART E				
Pretribulation Rapture View				
Alleging Two Future Comings (<i>Parousias</i>) for the Lord				
The Present Age	Coming↓↑ “Rapture”	Tribu- lation	↓Coming “Second Coming”	T h e K i n g d o m → Millennium

The rebellion puzzle. Both premillennial views share the puzzle of the rebellion at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:7-9).³⁶ Since the rebels will be unglorified people a thousand years into the kingdom, where will they come from? The answer to their origin must take into account certain facts:

- Only people who have been born again of the Spirit, can see/enter the kingdom (John 3:3, 5).
- Only born-again people with glorified bodies and confirmed in holiness can “inherit” the kingdom (1 Cor. 15:50; Heb. 12:14).
- Everybody who gets raptured will on that occasion get a glorified body and be confirmed in holiness (1 Cor. 15:51-54).
- No such glorified person will subsequently be married or beget children (Luke 20:34-35).
- Therefore, the rebels at the end of the millennium must be descended from people who will enter it unglorified.

To my knowledge, neither millennial view has fully solved this puzzle. It is particularly perplexing for the post-tribulation view. That view teaches a “last-minute” Rapture at the end of the Tribulation. Those raptured believers cannot be the source of the rebels because they will not beget children. If so, when could others be born again to go unraptured/unglorified into the kingdom? Perhaps during the additional “days” referred to in Daniel 12:11-12. We do know from Zechariah 12:10 and 13:1 that many Israelites will be converted on the very day Jesus appears.

The pretribulation view professes a ready answer to the puzzle. Unglorified citizens of the kingdom will be people converted during the Tribulation, at least those who live through it. Without a Rapture they will enter the millennium and rear many descendants capable of rebelling. The post-tribulation “sheep” of Matthew 25:31-34, 46 are cited as examples of such people. However, that is another doubtful assumption. Since no one can **inherit** the kingdom unglorified, how can the “sheep” be told, “take **your inheritance**, the kingdom” (25:34)?

So the lack of a Rapture report in Matthew 25 proves little. Silence is rarely a good argument. A similar example is the gathering of Messiah’s elect ones after the Tribulation (Matt. 24:31). How do we know if they will be glorified at that time or not? They must be, sooner or later, in order to inherit. Both Rapture views must posit converted but unglorified people in the millen-

³⁶ That rebellion is not a puzzle to amillennialists because they believe the “millennium” is now. To them, the events of Revelation 20:7-9 will take place at the end of this age, just before Jesus returns. However, they have bigger puzzles. One is that the Book of Revelation does not put Jesus’ Second Coming after the millennium, as they require, but before it. See my writing on the coming of the kingdom in Revelation.

nium, people capable of marriage and subject to death. Sooner or later all such heirs must be glorified, the equivalent of yet another Rapture. The “first resurrection” will extend beyond Revelation 20:4-6.

Neither millennial view has worked out all these answers. But the post-tribulational view is the better one. It depends, in general, much more on biblical evidence than on theological suppositions.

Why Lean on Unlikely Evidence?

We have briefly considered several Dispensationalist arguments to support a Pretribulation Rapture view. For example:

- They make questionable inferences in Revelation. Why should we accept such conclusions when the direct evidence suggests something different? Many of God’s people/saints will be on earth during the Tribulation. Why deny that they will be His church? Why assume that the church will be raptured and removed beforehand? Such a removal is not pictured in Revelation—nor clearly anywhere else.
- They claim absolute imminence for the Rapture. They seek support in key passages, such as, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. But that passage does not mention the Rapture. The same “imminence” language used there for the Day of the Lord is used in the Gospels for the Second Coming.
- They sometimes confuse the Day of the Lord with the Rapture. The latter is only one incident in the former.
- They reject a consistent meaning for *parousia* (e.g., in 2 Thess. 2) and favor an esoteric meaning for the restrainer.

Why do Dispensationalists make such assumptions? Their main reason is their concept of the church. They think that God’s programs for the church and the nation Israel are so distinct that they cannot run concurrently.

Some Dispensationalist Beliefs about the Church

In the Gospels the church (*ekklesia*) is mentioned by name only in Matthew 16 and 18. The first of these records Messiah's promise to build it. This He began to do at Pentecost, by baptizing men in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12-13).³⁷ Dispensationalists agree—and rightfully insist that the church is not Israel and Israel is not the church. But they go on to conclude that the two are essentially different—and will remain so at least through the millennium. How do they reach their conclusion? In the case of Israel, there is no lack of texts to consider. Several covenants and many prophecies, interpreted normally, describe that nation and its program. In general, the covenants are theirs (Rom. 9:4; Eph. 2:12)—even the new covenant (Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:8-13).³⁸ But in the case of the church, Dispensationalists cite no special covenant. There is none. Instead, from a few proof texts in the Epistles, they infer that the church has a character and program superior to Israel's. As a result, they have misconceptions about the church, about eight of which are shown in Chart F.

CHART F Dispensationalist Misconceptions about the Church that is, the <i>Ekklesia</i> , Messiah's Body, which He began forming at Pentecost	
Misconceptions about the Church	Corrections
It was first envisioned in Matthew 16.	It was foreseen in the Old Testament, for example, in Psalm 22:22, which is so quoted in Hebrews 2:12.
It was not defined until Paul's writings.	It was defined by Old Testament usage of the term, as Messiah's entire kingdom assembly. There was a secret about it, revealed through all the apostles: that it includes Gentiles as Gentiles (Eph. 3:5-6).
It will be limited to those who receive the Spirit up until a Pretribulation Rapture.	It will always include everyone Jesus incorporates into His body by baptizing them in the Spirit. In this respect, the time of the Rapture is irrelevant.
It will be closed to other saints, even after they are resurrected and glorified.	It will include all those Jesus glorifies, since His purpose will be for them to inherit with Himself.

³⁷ Some believe that the Spirit does the baptizing. Matthew 3:11 and parallels, however, clearly assign that work to the Messiah Himself. So 1 Corinthians 12:13 should be translated accordingly: "in [not by] one Spirit."

³⁸ Because the covenants belong to Israel (Rom. 9:4), some Dispensationalists exclude the church even from the new covenant. (That is in spite of Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 7:22; 8:6; 9:15; et al.) They cannot fully appreciate Paul's celebration in Ephesians 2:11-22 for

you who are Gentiles by birth... You were separate from Messiah... and the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Messiah... who has made the two [Gentiles and Israel] one and has destroyed the barrier... by abolishing the law...

Romans 11 pictures this new relationship as being grafted into Israel's "olive tree." It does not cancel a special future for national Israel but does imply that we participate in the same covenants.

CHART F	
Dispensationalist Misconceptions about the Church that is, the <i>Ekklesia</i> , Messiah's Body, which He began forming at Pentecost	
Misconceptions about the Church	Corrections
It will be distinct from Israel even after "all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26).	It will include many nations as its components, among them converted Israel.
It will have greater honor than Israel and others, as co-rulers with Messiah in the millennium.	All redeemed humanity will rule forever. This was God's original plan, ratified in various prophecies.
It is heavenly whereas Israel is earthly. ³⁹	It is both heavenly and earthly, adjectives that are not mutually exclusive. No goal can be more heavenly than Messiah's eternal kingdom on earth.
God "keeps distinct the Church as another purpose...in addition to His kingdom purposes." ⁴⁰	Messiah creates His church to inherit His kingdom. That purpose is evident from the day when He predicted that He would build it.

The Church and the Kingdom. At the root of Dispensationalist church views is their conviction that God's kingdom promises are designed for Israel but not for the church. Observe how that misses the point in Matthew 16:13-20, where Jesus announced that He would build His church.⁴¹

- The occasion for His announcement was the Great Confession that Jesus is the King. This was given similarly in the first three Gospels and voiced by Simon Peter as spokesman.
- Until this occasion there was a constant underlying message that the kingdom God promised and Israel expected had drawn near. Matthew gives that message great emphasis, beginning with John the Baptist (see Matthew 3:2; 4:17; and 10:7).
- Meanwhile, Jesus (a) preached about the need to repent in order to enter the kingdom (Matt. 5-7) and (b) performed miracles that could bring the kind of kingdom that was predicted (especially Matt. 8-10). When His people rejected Him (Matt. 11-12), He revealed secrets about the kingdom to His disciples only (Matt. 13). The kingdom would come in glory only after a delay.
- Jesus kept training the apostles while withdrawing from possible conflicts (Matt. 14-16). At that time He got them to give their opinion of Him. Through Simon they ascribed to Him a well-known title: "You are the Messiah" (Matt. 16:16; Mark 8:29). Luke 9:20 says, "the Messiah of God." This title became by far the main point in the sermons throughout Acts

³⁹ "The dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity." (L.S. Chafer, *Dispensationalism*, p. 107, quoted by Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, [Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1965], p. 45). Ryrie goes on to comment, "This is probably the most basic theological test of whether or not a man is a dispensationalist...."

⁴⁰ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, p. 173.

⁴¹ For much more detail and proof, see my writings on Matthew and on the Kingdom.

(see Acts 5:42). It means that Jesus will be the Ruler (the One Anointed) in the promised kingdom.⁴²

- Jesus gave a twofold response to this confession of His rulership (Matt. 16:17-18). First, He blessed the spokesman, changing his name to Peter (man of rock). Second, He announced that “on this rock” He would build His *ekklesia*. That term, like *Messiah*, was also well-known, referring in the Greek Old Testament to Israel as God’s kingdom assembly (Deut. 4:10; 9:10; 18:16; et al.). Therefore, the apostles must have understood that Jesus’ *ekklesia* would be His own kingdom assembly.
- Jesus proceeded to promise the apostles’ spokesman “the keys of the kingdom” (Matt. 16:18-19). Keys symbolize authority (Isa. 22:22). This meant that He would give to the spokesman—and to those he represents—authority in the kingdom when it comes.⁴³ All of God’s servants “will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 22:5; cf. Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 6:2–3; 2 Tim. 2:12; Heb. 2:5–10).

Since the church is Jesus’ kingdom assembly, its main interest should be His coming and His subsequent kingdom. That kingdom is worth far more to us than a hidden treasure or a perfect pearl (Matt. 13:44-46)—worth all that we have. Our goal is basically the same as that of the chosen nation. And no Scriptural passage assures us that we will miss the final steps (that is, the Great Tribulation) leading to that goal.

The cross for all disciples. Everyone following Jesus to His triumph also bears His cross. We cannot hang onto this life if we trust Him for the next. “Let us, then, go to Him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace He bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Heb. 13:13). Indeed, vast numbers have already given their lives for their faith. This situation cannot change until Messiah comes. It will certainly get worse. But we can count on His promise and His presence.

⁴² Matthew—but not Mark nor Luke—adds the synonymous title, “the Son of the living God,” which emphasizes the thought that He is God’s Heir. God had called the kings of Israel His “sons”; see Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 as quoted in Hebrews 1:5. At the Great Confession, the apostles did not confess Jesus’ deity but His right to rule. If “Son of God” had meant deity here, it would have been included in Mark’s and Luke’s accounts of the same confession.

⁴³ Jesus promised to have the twelve apostles “sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28). Yet, they are now part of the foundation for God’s present people and household (Eph. 2:19-20). These two aspects of their role do not suggest two separate programs.

When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near...Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. (Luke 21:28, 31)

God has said,
“Never will I leave you;
never will I forsake you.”

So we say with confidence,
“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.
What can man do to me?” (Heb. 13:5b, 6)

Appendix: The Two *Parousia* Theory of the Lord's Return

The Greek term parousia often referred to the public coming of a high official, such as a king. That term is used several times in the New Testament for Jesus' coming again, most often in Matthew 24 (vv. 3, 27, 37, 39), 1 Thessalonians (2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23), 2 Thessalonians (2:1, 8), and 2 Peter (1:16; 3:4). Nearly every sample passage below uses parousia or an equivalent—for that grand event all Christians wait for. The samples given are listed in categories according to what I here call "The Two Parousia Theory." Proponents of that theory, however, rarely use that term. They prefer to speak of one future coming with two phases, which they call "the Rapture" and "the Second Coming."

I. The First *Parousia*, which two-*parousia* proponents call "The Rapture."

They say that on this occasion the Lord will come (a) before the Tribulation (b) for His saints, (c) to give them resurrection bodies and (d) take them to heaven. (No destination is stated in any passage they classify as Rapture, but is thought to be implied in three of them.) They also say, on the negative side, that none of these passages speaks of (a) signs we should look for, (b) public display of the Lord's glory, or (c) the Lord's purpose being to rule in His kingdom on earth.

- A. Examples that refer to our resurrection or being gathered—and are thought to imply our destination.
1. John 14:1-3 "I will come back and take you to be with me" In the context He prepares us rooms in the Father's House.
BUT why should He take us to heaven if the Father's House descends to earth (Rev. 21)?
 2. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 "the coming [*parousia*] of the Lord...The Lord himself will come down...with the trumpet call...The dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive...will be caught up together with them...to meet the Lord...And so we will be with the Lord forever."
BUT the verb "to meet" does not imply a different destination. It is used in Acts 28 when Roman believers went out from Rome to meet Paul, then returned to Rome with him.
 3. Philippians 3:20-21 "our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there...who...will transform our lowly bodies...."
BUT (a) this says nothing specific about destination, and (b) speaks of His "power that enables him to bring everything under his control," which refers to His kingdom on earth.
- B. Examples that affirm our resurrection or being gathered but not our destination.
1. 2 Thessalonians 2:1 "the coming [*parousia*] of our Lord Jesus Messiah and our being gathered to him"
BUT why should this not refer also to the beginning of His kingdom, as the same word *parousia* does in verse 8? (Verse 1 introduces the subject resolved in v. 8; see below.)
 2. 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 "We will not all sleep [have died] but we will all be changed... the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable...." (His coming is implied.)
BUT verse 23 shows that this is His coming to reign, and verse 50 explains that resurrection is needed to inherit the kingdom.

C. Examples that simply mention the Lord's coming as our expectation.

1. 1 Corinthians 1:7-8 "You eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed....you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

BUT (a) "revealed" implies making Him known to the world and (b) "the day of the Lord" implies His glory and His kingdom.

2. Revelation 22:7, 12, 20 "I am coming soon."

BUT why should this not be classified as the Second Coming, as is the same promise in 1:7 (see below)?

II. The Second Parousia, which two-*parousia* proponents call "The Second Coming."

(Most of these examples use the term *parousia*. Many other promises of His Second Coming, such as, in Matthew 13, 16, 19, 25, do not.)

They say that on this occasion the Lord will come in glory, with the saints, to rule on earth.

They also say that none of these passages mentions the Rapture.

A. Examples that seem to imply "gathering" or resurrection. These two use the word *parousia*. Revelation 20:4-6 describes a resurrection after Jesus' coming (19:11-21) without that word.

1. Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39 "the coming [*parousia*] of the Son of Man"

BUT doesn't the promise "they will gather his elect" (v. 31) refer to the Rapture? What justifies identifying these elect as only Israel, not the church?

2. 1 Corinthians 15:22-28 "in Christ all will be made alive....when he comes, those who belong to him....for he must reign until..."

BUT how can we justify distinguishing this resurrection from the Rapture?

B. Examples that at most imply judging men or setting up the kingdom.

1. Luke 19:12-15 "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return....He was made king...and returned home. Then he sent for the servants...to find out what they had gained."

BUT the king's judging His servants here cannot be harmonized with supposedly rapturing and removing them years earlier. Here He stays on earth and rules with them.

2. 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 "God will pay back trouble to those who trouble **you** and give relief to **you** who are troubled, and to **us** as well...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels...on the day he comes to be glorified."

BUT how will His public revelation bring relief to "you" and "us" if we are already in heaven, exempt from the Tribulation?

3. 2 Thessalonians 2:8 "the lawless one...whom the Lord Jesus will...destroy by the splendor of his coming [*parousia*]."

BUT why should "His *parousia*" in this verse be considered distinct from (later than) His *parousia* in verse 1? Is it just because (a) some now interpret the "removal" of the Restraint in verses 5-7 as the Rapture and (b) this coming is said to lead to His immediate rule?

4. Revelation 1:7 "Look, he is coming with the clouds."

BUT why is this considered different from the same promises in chapter 22? Like them, it "must soon take place" (1:1) and "the time is near" (1:3). But Dispensationalists say that the two must be different because this coming will be public and seen worldwide.