

THE PRE-TRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE

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THE PRE-TRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE

The glorious appearing of Christ is the blessed hope of the Christian (Tit. 2:13). The comfort of this hope is connected to the truth that concern over the sufferings of this present time will fade in comparison with the glory of our future (Rom. 8:18-25). Paul's contrast in these passages and others like them involves two settings for the Church, "the sufferings of this present time" versus "the glory that is to be revealed to us." The eternal hope of the latter gives us patience for the temporal sufferings of the former.

Yet the Scripture indicates also that an intervening period awaits the world, a period which is unaccounted for in the apostle's optimistic reporting on the believer's hopeful future in these passages. Between "the sufferings of this present time" and "the glory that is to be revealed to us," a period awaits that the prophecy of the Scripture describes as the "hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (Rev. 3:10).

Daniel's 70th week is coming (Dan. 9:24-27). Known to the prophets as the Day of the Lord, the Time of Jacob's Trouble, and the Time of Tribulation, these seven years promise the unprecedented outpouring of the wrath of God on the earth (Joel 2:1-2, Jer. 30:7, Dan. 12:1). God sends a strong delusion; the man of lawlessness controls the world; and natural cataclysm becomes routine (2 Thess. 2:1-12). "The Day of Yahweh's Wrath" will devour the earth in the fire of His jealousy. "He will make a complete end, indeed a terrifying one, of all the inhabitants of the earth" (Zeph. 1:18).

The reconciliation of the believer's optimistic hope with the coming wrath of God upon all the inhabitants of the earth is the concern of this article. While considerable controversy exists on this topic with differences of opinion among good men, all premillennialists agree that the Rapture of the church will happen. Paul refers to this coming event in 1 Thess. 4:17 with the words, "Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." The differences among premillennialists seek to answer questions about the timing of this event in relation to the 70th week.

The underlying question, however, is whether the New Testament reconciles for us the tension between the hopeful optimism of the believer looking for the Lord and the predicted period of tribulation for the earth that precedes His Second Advent. The advocates for a post-tribulation Rapture begin with the unity of the Second Advent they find in Scripture. Consequently, they credit the hope of the believer with a super-human courage in the face of the tribulation period to satisfy the need for this reconciliation.¹ Conversely, the pre-tribulation Rapture proponents believe that the answer lies in finding a multiplicity in the Second Advent. Phase one represents the Rapture of the Church, fulfilling the hope of the believer while protecting him from the wrath of God, and phase two is the Parousia proper, when Christ comes to earth to establish His kingdom. This is the position advocated in this article. The mid-tribulation positions fall somewhere in

¹ "We are told in the Apocalypse that they even call in their terror upon the rocks and the mountains to hide them from Him who comes. . . Their guilty consciences warn them that it is a day of judgement [*sic*]. With us Christians, however, it is different. . . What to the world is a day of judgement, striking terror into their hearts, will be to Christians a day of salvation, light, and redemption, filling their souls with joy." Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ: An Examination of the Teachings of J. N. Darby and his Followers* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott Ltd., n. d.), 226-227.

between these approaches, generally failing to address either of the components requiring reconciliation, the hopeful optimism and the simple unity.

HERMENEUTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Hermeneutics plays a big role in the Bible student's understanding of prophecy. On the millennial question, the hermeneutical issue is foundational. The literal approach yields the premillennial view, and the allegorical approach yields one of the other understandings. But unity in regard to this cornerstone issue fails to unite premillennialists in regard to the timing of the Rapture. The reason this lack of unity exists relates to the application of two subordinate hermeneutical principles popular among literalists: the full mention principle and the agreement principle.²

The full mention principle is "that principle by which God declares His full mind upon any subject vital to our spiritual life. Somewhere in the Word, God gathers together the scattered fragments that have to do with a particular truth, and puts them into one exhaustive statement."³ When it comes to the timing of the Rapture relative to the tribulation, however, most seem agreed that this kind of definitive statement is lacking.⁴ Yet the upper hand clearly must go to the proponents of the post-tribulation view of the

² See J. Edwin Hartill, *Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1947).

³ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴ "There is no indication of the state of the raptured believer, neither is there any indication of timing." Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 845. "The Scriptures do not give a specific statement concerning the time of this event. As a result, every person who studies the subject of the Rapture is forced to look for inferences of its time from different details presented in the Bible." Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord Come! A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1995), 13.

Rapture in regard to the full mention principle, because it is their system that avoids the need for a time separate from the fully mentioned timing of the Parousia.⁵

However, the agreement principle appears to favor at least some kind of modification of the post-tribulation position. That principle states, “the truthfulness and faithfulness of God become the guarantee that He will not set forth any passage in His Word which contradicts any other passage.”⁶ Within the context of this principle, pre-tribulation Rapture proponents assert that finding the destiny of the Church in the tribulation is incongruent with passages that teach the Church would be kept from this great hour of testing (Rev. 3:10, 1 Thess. 1:10, 2 Thess. 5:9-10). Even the most resolute of the advocates of the post-tribulation Rapture viewpoint have trouble making this period, which is characterized as “a complete end, indeed a terrifying one, of all the inhabitants of the earth” (Zeph. 1:18), agree with the need to “comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:18). How do we “make disciples. . .even unto the end of the

⁵ The full mention of the timing of the Parousia in relation to the Great Tribulation is apparent in the format of the book of Revelation as well as in the clear statements of Matthew 24:29-31. In regard to the Matthew 24 passage, post-tribulation interpreters see a reference to the rapture in verse 31, “And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together the elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.” They go on to see the “one taken and the other left” terminology of verses 38-41 as another reference to the rapture at the time of the Parousia after the Great Tribulation. Two considerations, however, indicate that the rapture of the Church is actually not in view in Matthew 24. First, the elect of verse 31 are gathered from the sky, not from the earth. As such, they contrast those on the earth who are characterized as moaning under the weight of the Great Tribulation (v. 30). These are evidently saints who have already been resurrected and are dwelling in heaven, not on earth. Second, the context of the taking away of verses 39-41 is judgment, not rescue. Just as the flood waters took people away to the judgment of God in the days of Noah, so also would men and women be taken away at the coming of the Son of Man (vv. 38-39). Those who are left behind are those who escape judgment in this context, just as Noah’s family did. What Christ gives us here is a description of the results of God’s work among the Jews during the Great Tribulation. Jews are saved and are left behind when the judgment of God takes men away. That the Jews are the focus of Christ in this passage is plain from verse 34, “Truly I say to you, this race [the Jews] will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words [the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants guaranteeing a future for the nation of Israel!] will not pass away.

⁶ Hartill, 84.

age” (Matt. 28:19-20), while God is sending upon the world “a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false,” because “they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” (2 Thess. 2:10-12)? The consequence of this difficulty is apparent in some of the fudging which goes on even among the post-tribulation Rapture position’s most ardent defenders. Note the drift away from the exact timing of the Parousia in the following quote:

The essential fact for us to know is that Jesus by His death, has delivered us from the wrath to come, and that *immediately* prior to the full revelation of divine wrath, He will gather the saints to Himself.⁷

While the author attempts to save his case by italicizing the word, “immediately,” the attempt is unsuccessful. With this statement his view of the Rapture has effectively left the higher ground of identification with the exact timing of the Parousia in order to accommodate the Scriptural truth that the Church shall avoid God’s wrath. He has abandoned safety in regard to the full mention principle in order to conform more fully to the principle of agreement. This is all the pre-tribulation Rapture position seeks to do, except that the pre-tribulation view makes provision for a broader understanding of “the full revelation of divine wrath.”

To be sure, failure in regard to the agreement principle is a more serious offence than failure in regard to the full mention principle. A lack of full mention implies only that the topic fails to rise to the level of something vitally necessary to the Christian life. A lack of agreement, however, destroys the foundation of revelation itself. But admitting the importance of both, the lack of full mention within the context of the pre-tribulation

⁷ Reese, 226.

Rapture view is more readily accounted for than is the lack of agreement within the context of the post-tribulation Rapture position.

The full mention principle applies differently to prophecy than it does to other genres of scripture. The characteristic of unidentified time intervals in prophecy conflicts with the normal full mention idea.⁸ To illustrate, when Isaiah authored the prophecy of the Anointed One in Isaiah 61:1-3, he undoubtedly could not have anticipated the fact that he was prophesying two comings of Christ, not one. Christ Himself clarified the correct interpretation (Luke 4:16-21), and today we know that there are nearly two thousand years and counting between the first and second lines of verse 2. Learning from Isaiah's experience, we have the advantage of caution as we read passages of prophecy whose fulfillment is yet future for us. It may be that the full mention of a pre-tribulation Rapture does indeed exist in the descriptions of the Church's hope in those New Testament passages that seem to share many parallels, including the same terminology and context, with the full mention of the Parousia. Yet just as a correct understanding of the Old Testament prophet required the interpretation of two phases of the coming of the Messiah, so also a correct interpretation of the New Testament prophet may require seeing the Rapture as distinct from the Parousia in the Second Advent. Statements, such as "But this passage [2 Thessalonians 2] makes no mention of the rapture, which seems strange if it forms the focal point for the release of wickedness,"⁹ parallel what the Jews

⁸ For a description of this principle see Paul N. Benware, *Understanding A End Times Comprehensive Prophecy Approach* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 25-26. Also note the "Gap Principle" in Hartill, 92.

⁹ Guthrie, 847.

still say about the first advent of Christ today in their interpretation of Isaiah 61. The problem could be myopia rather than a lack of full mention.

AGREEMENT WITH IMMINENCY

Within this hermeneutical framework, passages relevant to the timing of the Rapture will now be examined. The agreement principle requires that our view of the timing of the Rapture agree with the New Testament doctrine of the imminent character of the Lord's return. Renald Showers contributes a forceful definition for the imminent character of the Lord's return.

. . .the concept of the imminent coming of Christ is that His next coming is always hanging overhead, is constantly ready to befall or overtake us, is always close at hand in the sense that it could happen at any moment. Other things may happen before Christ's coming, but nothing else must happen before it takes place. If something else must happen before it can take place, then it is not imminent. The necessity of something else taking place first destroys the concept of the imminent coming of Christ.¹⁰

The concept of imminence may be illustrated with the picture of a housewife who has just heard that old friends will be passing through town at some point over the next couple of weeks. For whatever reason, the details of these travel plans are not precisely known, but it is known that the arrival date can be as early as tomorrow or as late as two weeks from now. Under these conditions, the caring homemaker must live with the expectation that her guests can arrive at any moment. As a result, her behavior changes. Her three small children must now pick up their rooms immediately after making their mess rather than waiting until after dinner. The carpets stay vacuumed, and concern is

¹⁰ Showers, 128.

expressed over the tracking-in of dirt in an ongoing way. In fact, shoes must now stay in the garage. All this would be different if the estimated time of arrival was known to be a week from Thursday, or if we knew that their arrival would transpire on the fourth sunny day after two consecutive days of rain for some reason.

This concept of imminence and its consequential change in behavior are important New Testament themes related to the Second Advent of the Lord. 1 John 2:28 is one of a number of passages which make the connection between the imminence of the Lord's return and holy living.¹¹ "Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming." Here we have the need for ongoing readiness with the present tense "be abiding," the apostle's personal expectation with the first-person pronoun "we," the element of uncertainty with the phrase, "when He appears," and the purposeful "so that," which connects the need to continually abide with the fact that the possibility of the Lord's return is a continuing reality.

Those who understand the power of imminence to motivate godly living also understand the dangers of the view that the Bridegroom is delaying His coming (Matt. 25:1-13; 2 Pet. 3:4). Pastor C. H. Spurgeon saw that the doctrine of imminence is much more than an academic concern.

The Scripture has left the whole matter, as far as I can see, with an intentional indistinctness, that we may be always expecting Christ to come, and that we may be watching for his coming at any hour and every hour. . .

Brethren, I would be earnest on this point, for the notion of the delay of Christ's Coming is always harmful, however you arrive at it, whether it be by studying prophecy, or in any other way. . .

¹¹ Other passages include 1 Cor. 1:7; 4:5; Phil. 3:20; 4:5; 1 Thess. 1:10; Tit. 2:13; James 5:7-9; Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12, 17, 20. Ibid., 128-142.

People of the Tabernacle, you are set to watch to-night just as they did in the brave days of old! Whitefield and Wesley's men were watchers; and those before them, in the days of Luther and Calvin, and backward even to the days of our Lord. They kept the watches of the night, and you must do the same, until . . . you go forth to welcome your returning Lord.¹²

Clearly, it is the pre-tribulation rapture view that agrees with this doctrine of imminence.

Only this view provides that Christ can come now.

REVELATION 7 AND FULL MENTION

Revelation 7 may be cited as an example of the full mention of the Rapture event. In that passage, John sees "a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (v. 9). Clearly, these are an innumerable mass of Gentile (and Jewish?) believers who are worshipping Christ safely in heaven while the tribulation rages on the earth.

The nature of their worship, described as "day and night in the temple" (v. 15), and their blessed state, "God will wipe every tear from their eyes" (v. 17) seems to contrast the martyrs of the tribulation we read about in the 5th seal passage of Rev. 6:9-11. The martyrs of the tribulation, not yet resurrected, dwell "underneath the altar" and yet cry out "O Lord, how long!" The sequence of these scenes puts this heavenly crowd between the sixth and seventh seal of the Great Tribulation period. Its description follows that of the 144,000, who are specifically described as still on the earth (vv. 1-3). Those in heaven contrast those on earth, but they are concurrent.

Those in heaven are clothed in white robes, have palm branches in their hands, and fall on their faces, all indications that these saints have experienced the

¹² Quoted in Showers, 146-147.

transformation of resurrected bodies.¹³ One of the elders asks John whether or not he knew where these had come from (v. 13).¹⁴ The angel answers his own question by saying, “These are the ones who are come *out of* (ἐκ) the great tribulation” (v. 14; NASB). That phrase, along with the need to distinguish the innumerable multitude from the 24 elders in the vision, presents the greatest challenge to finding a full mention of the pre-tribulation rapture in Revelation 7.

Typically, this phrase *out of the great tribulation* is interpreted as asserting that multitudinous revivals are going to take place during the Great Tribulation after the rapture of the church, and that the scene in heaven describes those who were executed as martyrs as a result of those revivals. That interpretation, however, is unlikely for the following reasons: (1) these saints appear to have resurrected bodies, an event that takes place either at the Rapture of the Church prior to the Great Tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4), or, for the tribulations saints, after the Great Tribulation at the Parousia (Rev 20:4), but not on an ad hoc basis after martyrdom during the Great Tribulation; (2) this scene in chapter 7 contrasts those victims of the 5th seal who are obviously a numerable set of martyrs from the Great Tribulation (Rev. 6:9-11); (3) the nature of the tribulation as a time of unparalleled destruction on all flesh of the earth and Satanic worldwide deception of those who have rejected the gospel in this age (2 Thess. 2:10-12) precludes the multitudinous revivals during the Great Tribulation imagined by this interpretation; and (4) the preposition ἐκ when used with ἔρχομαι is the opposite of ἔρχομαι εἰς. The

¹³ Note that in the case of the martyrs of chapter 6 not yet resurrected, white robes were given to them but the text does not specify that they actually wore them. See L. S. Thornton, *Christ and the Church* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1956), 129, who believes that these white robes “represent the risen bodies of the saints.”

¹⁴ πῶθεν, meaning simply “from where,” not “out of what” per se.

later means *come unto* (not usually specifically *come into*), and the former in the context of Revelation 7 could mean simply *come away from* (not specifically *come out of*).¹⁵ If so, verse 14 is better translated, “these are the ones who are come away from the great tribulation.”¹⁶ Therefore, the phrase does not preclude the interpretation that sees a full mention of the results of a pre-tribulation Rapture of the Church in Revelation 7.

That the innumerable multitude must be distinguished from the 24 elders is another challenge for this view. The vision of Rev. 7:9-17 mentions both groups as distinct, so they are not to be confused. They have some things in common. Both wear white garments (4:4, 7:9, 14) and both are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb from every nation and people (5:9, 7:9, 14).

Still, their differences are significant. The saints of the innumerable multitude lack the elders’ thrones and crowns, which they use to glorify and worship the Lord (4:4, 10), and their harps and golden vials filled with the prayers of the saints (5:8). Instead, they stand before the throne and bear palm-branches for the purpose of their worship (7:9). The elders are made kings and priests who reign on the earth (5:10), whereas the innumerable multitude serve God night and day in the temple (7:15).¹⁷ Clearly, two

¹⁵ See the phrases in John 12:27 [see also 13:1], “Save me from this hour,” and “came I unto this hour,” for this contrast between ἐκ and εἰς in another context involving time periods. D. A. Carson notes, in regard to Matthew’s use of ἀπό in Matt. 3:16 and Mark’s use of ἐκ in Mark 1:10, “In the NT period the preposition ἀπό (*apo*, “out of”) cannot always be distinguished in meaning from ἐκ (*ek*).” Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, *Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 110. B. F. Westcott, while treating Heb. 5:7, comments on the phrase “able to save him [Jesus] from [ἐκ] death,” “ἐκ does not necessarily imply that that is actually realized out of which deliverance is granted.” *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (1892; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 126. In other words, Jesus could pray to the one able to save Him out of death without having to first be dead. To be saved out of death means to be saved from death. *To come out of* the great tribulation may mean *to come away from* the great tribulation.

¹⁶ Note the gnomic present tense.

¹⁷ Joseph Seiss summarizes this difference: “as golden crowns exceed palm-branches, and kings are above servants, and the possession of a throne is more than to stand before one, even by so much is the

classes of saints are discernable in these descriptions. The elders represent a class of redeemed believers whose reward in some respects seems to be greater than the reward of the saints of the innumerable multitude.

This distinction in reward, however, need not extend to a distinction in the timing of their redemption (church age vs. tribulation) or in whether or not they experience the rapture. It is possible that believers raptured together are given different rewards in relation to the future kingdom. Scripture is clear that believers will receive different rewards depending on their faithfulness prior to the rapture, but there is no evidence that we appear before the judgment seat of Christ at different times having been translated by different events, Rev. 20:4 excepted.¹⁸

So, if the distinction between the 24 elders and the innumerable multitude is understood strictly in terms of a distinction in their reward due to their varied faithfulness, the mention of both in Revelation 7 does not preclude interpreting the chapter as a full mention of the results of a pre-tribulation rapture.

THE THESSALONIANS AND FULL MENTION

1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 can also be read as a full mention of the pre-tribulation timing of the Rapture of the Church: “Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you

heavenly estate held out to us [believers represented by the 24 elders] than that of these Palm-bearers [whom Seiss sees to be tribulation saints].” *The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (1865; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 178.

¹⁸ This difference in reward is seen even in the letters to the churches, where Smyrna is promised the crown of life for faithfulness (2:10) and Philadelphia cautioned to hold fast what they possessed so as not to lose their crown (3:11) – both admonitions coming before the promises to all who overcome by faith. Smyrna and Philadelphia are the two churches that do not hear a correction from their Lord, but only commendation and encouragement. Passages that speak of differing rewards for church-age believers support this conclusion, such as the parable of the talents in Matt. 25:14-30 (where note that there is no second chance after the coming of the Master to take account) and Paul’s instruction regarding building God’s temple, the local church, in 1 Cor. 3:10-21, where some are saved, yet so as by fire having suffered some loss.

have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.” On the heels of the full-mention passage for the Rapture event (4:13-18), Paul makes the point that a full-mention passage on the timing of the Rapture was unnecessary. He felt this way for some specific reasons. First, Paul was confident that the Thessalonian church understood that date-setting was not possible due to the imminence of the Day of the Lord (v. 2). Yet this thief of destruction was no threat to these Christians because they were not in darkness (vv. 4-5), because they had the tools for readiness (vv. 6-8), and because whether they were ready or not, Christ’s work of salvation had ensured a destiny free from the wrath of God (vv. 9-10).¹⁹

In contrast, however, timing seems to be a real problem in Paul’s second letter to the church. Now, 1 Thess. 5:1’s lack of need to write of this timing no longer applies, because the church definitely needed someone to write them about the times and the epochs related to the Rapture and the coming of the Day of the Lord. 2 Thess. 2:2 makes clear that the church had mistakenly been “quickly shaken from [their] composure” and “disturbed” by the view that the Day of the Lord had come.²⁰ The fact that the theme of

¹⁹ Paul clearly uses the term, “Day of the Lord,” in its broad sense as a synonym for Daniels 70th week in his discourse with the Thessalonians. This is the period of the wrath of God. The post-tribulation view, which restricts the use of this term in the Thessalonian epistles to its narrow sense, as a synonym for the Parousia, cannot be validated with the context of 1 Thessalonians 5. No one will be saying, “Peace and safety!” (1 Thess. 5:3) immediately prior to the Parousia as they gather for Armageddon (Rev. 6:16-17; 16:9, 11, 21; 18:9-24; 19:19).

²⁰ Again, reconciling a view that the Day of the Lord has come with the disturbance that the Thessalonians were experiencing is impossible if the Day of the Lord is equated with the Parousia event rather than Daniel’s 70th week in this context. If the Day of the Lord equals the Parousia here, the believers would have felt elation over the misunderstanding that they were ruling and reigning with Christ.

the coming of the Day of the Lord appears in this passage means that the Rapture event is there *de facto*. The context given by 1 Thessalonians 4-5 provides for this assumption.

There are three things that Paul uses to definitively mark the beginning of the Day of the Lord in this passage: (1) the apostasy (v. 3), (2) he who restrains will be taken out of the way (v. 7), and (3) the revelation of the lawless one (vv. 3, 8). As the listed verses indicate, the revelation of the antichrist is mentioned twice, once in connection with the apostasy (v. 3), and once in connection with the removal of the restrainer (vv. 7-8). This construction seems to indicate that the apostasy and the removal of the restrainer are one in the same in some sense. So then, Paul seeks to assure the Thessalonian church that they were not stuck in the Day of the Lord by highlighting the fact that the apostasy-restrainer removal event had not yet taken place.

But the new information in 2 Thessalonians 2 relates to the sequencing, not the nature of the events listed in 1 Thessalonians 4-5. The events in that passage, the Rapture and the Day of the Lord, parallel the events in this later chapter, the apostasy-restrainer removal event and the Day of the Lord, except that in this chapter the sequence is clarified. While equating the meaning of ἡ ἀποστασία with the Rapture has been understandably challenged by able men,²¹ it is difficult to see how the promise of a falling away from the faith would bring great relief to those disturbed by their

²¹ “Lampe’s lexicon of the patristic period also lists ‘revolt, defection’ as the primary meaning of ἀποστασία [the meaning had evidently not changed much since the days of Paul]; however, there is one example given of spatial departure. . . . This reference to a spatial departure is found in a NT apocryphal work entitled *The Assumption of the Virgin*. . . . This “rapture” is now described as a “departure,” the Greek word being ἀποστασία. Here is clear evidence that ἀποστασία can refer to a “rapture”; however, *The Assumption of the Virgin* can be dated no earlier than the fifth century A. D.” See William W. Combs, “Is Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 a Reference to the Rapture?” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 3 (Fall, 1998), 80-81. Dr. Combs answers the question in the negative.

conclusions about the Day of the Lord. In addition, alternatives to seeing a reversal of the restraining influence of Pentecost with the Holy Spirit's removal in the Rapture of the Church in verse 7 are unconvincing. Paul encourages the Thessalonians with the assurance that their departure is a prerequisite for the antichrist's arrival.

In conclusion, the pre-tribulation view of the Rapture best conforms to the agreement principle of Bible interpretation in light of the doctrines of the believer's hope and Christ's imminent return. And while the full mention principle is also important to the Biblical doctrines we emphasize, a careful examination of Revelation 7 and the Thessalonian epistles shows that the pre-tribulation view of the Rapture can pass this test. Christ will come for us prior to the wrath of the tribulation week. Even so, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

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