

# Comforting One Another With the Rapture

## *Preliminary comments*

- ◆ Each view of the timing of the rapture raises difficult questions which cannot all be answered with dogmatic certainty –
- ◆ No view of the rapture’s timing is based on any explicit statements in scripture. Each view attempts to draw the best conclusions from the inferences that pertinent texts bring out.
- ◆ Some passages in the debate can be clearly taken more than just one way –
- ◆ No legitimate view should rely on minimal verses or obscure meanings; Neither should a view rest largely on historical teachers and their writings –
- ◆ No view should ever cause brothers and sisters in Christ to be offended, or unreconciled, or to totally separate.

## *Definition & Clarifications*

- ◆ “Rapture” –
  - ⇒ Used 14 times in the NT
    - “Stealing/Plundering” – Matt 11:12; 12:29; 13:19/John 10:12,28-29
    - “Removing” – John 6:15/ Acts 8:39; 23:10/Jude 23
    - “Caught up” – 2Cor 12:2,4 (Paul’s 3<sup>rd</sup> heaven experience)/Rev 12:5 (Christ’s ascension)
  - ⇒ Eschatological (end-times) use
    - 1Thess 4:13-18 – At Christ’s “descent”, believers are resurrected
    - 1Cor 15:51-52 – The dead are raised “imperishable” at God’s trumpet blast

**parousia** [Greek] – “Presence” or “to be present alongside”

Its eschatological use in the NT refers to the coming of Christ in general. It is not merely the actual arrival time or specific day, but the entirety of the circumstances surrounding His coming.

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## *Presuppositions*

- ◆ A futuristic view of Daniel 9:24-27 – (as opposed to the Preterist view that sees this prophecy completely fulfilled at the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D).
- ◆ A literal millennial reign of Jesus Christ

## *Three major Rapture views:*

Both the Midtribulation and Posttribulation views hold that the next events on the horizon of God's unfolding plan are the various "signs" of the Lord's coming to set up His kingdom (as outlined in Matt 24 and 2 Thess 2).

The Pretribulation view holds that the next event is the "catching away" of the church, and that the "signs" of Christ's coming occur during the tribulation, that they will be obvious to believers, and they begin to occur at the time of the rapture.

**PRETRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE** – Just prior to the inception of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> "week" (7 year period), the church is "caught up" to meet the Lord, taken to heaven, and thus always with Him & returning in glory when He comes to judge the nations.

## *General objections to the Pretrib view:*

- ◆ If Christ catches away His church, but doesn't return in judgment for the length of the tribulation, doesn't that equate to two "2<sup>nd</sup> comings?"
- ◆ Matt 24:31 speaks of angels gathering "the elect." **If this gathering refers to the rapture**, the church would be caught up during or after the tribulation since Matt 24:31 occurs within or at the end of the "great tribulation."
- ◆ Matt 24 & 2 Thess 2 seem to clearly indicate that "signs" will precede the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming – If we are to look for signs, how can Christ come "at any moment" without a hint?
- ◆ "Imminence" cannot mean Christ could return "at any moment" because:
  - ⇒ Jesus told the disciples they would be witnesses to the world – If Christ could've returned imminently after His ascension, how would the church have enough time to take the gospel into all the world?
  - ⇒ Peter was told that he would grow old (how old we're not told) – Knowing this fact, how could Peter and the Apostles have believed in an imminent return of Christ?

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**MID-TRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE** - The church is “caught up” to meet the Lord right at the mid-70<sup>th</sup> week point. In other words, when the temple is desecrated by the “abomination of desolation” (Dan 9:27/Matt 24:15), the 3½ years of “tribulation” begin. This view rests largely on four arguments:

- ⇒ Daniel’s mid-week transition between tribulation and “great” tribulation is the **focal point** of the week, drawing a sharp distinction between “tribulation” and “great tribulation.”
- ⇒ If the actual tribulation judgments begin at Rev 6:1, why are the martyred saints of 6:10 still crying out “How long, O Lord,...will You refrain from judging...those who dwell on the earth?”
- ⇒ The two witnesses of John’s apocalypse are viewed as symbolic of all believers and their being raptured, hence a rapture that takes place in the middle of Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week.
- ⇒ The “seventh trumpet” of Rev 11:15, which takes place mid-week, is viewed as identical with the “last trumpet” of 1 Cor 15:52, and the “trumpet of God” in 1 Thess 4:16, thereby viewing the rapture as happening at the middle of the tribulation.

### *General objections to the Midtrib view:*

- ◆ Daniel’s mid-70<sup>th</sup> week transition (from “tribulation” to “great tribulation”) is dramatic, but no explicit or implicit textual connection is made between the “abomination of desolation” (which happens at the 3½ year mark) and the rapture passages. To make such a direct connection seems a mere assumption.
- ◆ A strong case can be made that the “tribulation” (i.e. God’s wrath) begins when Jesus begins opening the end-times scroll. After all, the first seal (6:1-2) is a rider who “went out conquering”, the second seal brings global, wholesale hatred and war, the third seal causes massive famine, the fourth seal kills ¼ of the earth’s population, the fifth seal envisions the martyred saints calling for God’s just judgment on the world, and the sixth seal ushers in a total breakdown of the cosmos along with global panic. All of the above occurs before the trumpet judgments of Rev 11.
- ◆ The witnesses are individuals, not “symbols.” Furthermore, they die...so if they symbolize all believers, in what sense do all tribulation saints die?
- ◆ Equating the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet of Rev 11 with the “last trumpet” of both 1 Cor 15 and 1 Thess 4 doesn’t account for yet another trumpet sounding off for the gathering of all the elect (Matt 24). If the “last trumpet” occurs at the 3½ year point, why does Matthew 24:31 indicate another trumpet sounding at the end of the tribulation?

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**POSTTRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE** – The church is “caught up” to at the end of the tribulation, meeting the Lord in the air and then immediately returning with Him at His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.

### *General objections to the Posttrib view:*

- ◆ Why does Revelation 6-18 not mention anything about the church? Given the terrorizing antichristian bloodbath against the saints, and the horrifying global devastation that are depicted in these chapters, why are there no local fellowships seen powerfully carrying out the ministry of the gospel? Why are there no church leaders and under-shepherds seen tirelessly equipping and encouraging the saints during what Jesus called a time “such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall be” (Matt 24:21). Why do the 144,000 Jewish believers (Rev 7:3-8), the two witnesses (Rev 11:1-13), and the gospel-Angel flying in mid-heaven (Rev 14:6-7) have seemingly no interaction with the organized church?
- ◆ If the rapture comes after the tribulation, what possible comfort would that have been to the Thessalonians who were concerned that dead loved ones had missed the privilege of the rapture? Wouldn't they have rejoiced that dead believers had escaped the horrors of the “great tribulation?”
- ◆ It is not clear that the “gathering” in Matt 24:31 is the rapture. This might just as well be the gathering of the believers who are converted during the tribulation, and are either martyred or survive until Christ comes in judgment.
- ◆ If the church goes through the tribulation, but is “kept from God's wrath,” martyrdoms don't make sense, nor does Jesus' very specific prayer for protection (Rev 3:10).
- ◆ Why a rapture at all? Many Post-tribulationists reason that a rapture at the end of the tribulation protects God's people from Armageddon. If we are “preserved through” wrath during the great and terrible tribulation, why do we need to be caught up and protected from Armageddon?
- ◆ If all believers will be resurrected, and all unbelievers judged (Matt 25:31-46)...how will the millennial kingdom be populated with unglorified men and women whose children will be deceived by Satan in the final act of rebellion at millennium's end?

### *The Rapture in Church History*

Church Fathers were predominantly Premillennialists (referred to historically as Chiliasts – Those who believe in a literal, earthly millennial reign of Jesus Christ).

Barnabas (100-150)

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Papias (60-130)

Justin Martyr (110-165)

Irenaeus (120-202)

Tertullian (145-220)

Hippolytus (185-236)

Cyprian (200-250)

Lactantius (260-330)

With few exceptions, most held to some form of the idea that the church would experience some of the tribulation...

But, at the same time they almost universally held to a strong view of imminence, & that the Lord would come suddenly, at a time undiscovered...

It's difficult to reconcile these two emphases. Their view of being ready for the possibility of facing the tribulation seems common, yet they made strong statements about not knowing when the Lord would return, urging believers to be ready.

**THE DIDACHE (CA. 100-160** – Early church catechism for conduct in the fellowship)

“Be watchful for your life; let your lamps not be quenched and your loins not ungirded, but be ye ready; for you know not the hour in which our Lord comes.”

### *Arguments for a Pretribulational Rapture*

#### **A. Revelation 6-19 preeminently features Israel, not the church**

- ⇒ After the seal judgments begin (Rev 6:1ff), God marks 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel. Israel is seen again in 12:1-6; 13-17. They are worshiping before the throne in the vision of 14:1-5, having been purchased from the earth and set apart for God's service.
- ⇒ There is not one NT epistle that gives clear instruction to prepare the church for the unprecedented horrors of the tribulation. With all the specific teaching, doctrinal and ethical, concerning how the church is to conduct itself in the world, why is there no detailed instruction about how to interact with the 144,000 from the 12 tribes? Why is there no counsel on how to face the wrath of the antichrist? What about gospel ministry? Why do we have no teaching on how to further the gospel in the midst of

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divine judgments raining down upon the earth? Why is there no interaction with the two witnesses (Rev 11:3-13)? Since the church has been given so much explicit teaching for her earthly mission that began at Pentecost, it seems beyond reasonable that she would've received some preparation for her ministry during such a frightening period.

- ⇒ Not one local assembly appears in these chapters doing anything that resembles the "conduct" of the household of God (1 Tim 3:15). There appears to be no local assembly regularly gathering for equipping the saints, ministering spiritual gifts, training and affirming pastoral leadership, serving orphans and widows, disciplining unrepentant members, planting churches, collecting money for the saints, etc. In fact, the only time true Christians appear on the earth in Revelation 6-18, they are either part of the 144,000 of Israel (sealed and refreshed – 7:4-8; 12:1-6, 13-17; 11:19; 14:1-5), or saints being slaughtered en masse, or in heaven worshiping or praying (6:9-11; 8:3-4; 12:11; 13:7; 14:12-13; 15:2-4; 16:15; 18:24), or the two witnesses (11:3-12). Prior to chapter 6, messages of warning are sent to five churches of Asia Minor, messages of commendation are sent to two of the Asian churches (Rev 2-3), followed by John's vision of Almighty God and the Lamb being worshipped in heaven in the vision of Chapters 4 & 5. After that, local assemblies of believers do not appear in the unfolding of the events in Revelation.

The following parallels indicate that the tribulation period involves Israel's witness:

- ⇒ Dan 9:26-27 – Matt 24:15... Mid-week abomination
- ⇒ Dan 9:27 – Matt 24:21... "middle of the week" ushering in the "great tribulation" (Matt 24:21). Cf. also "forty-two months" (Rev 11:2/13:5), "One thousand two hundred and sixty days" (Rev 11:3/12:6), "a time, times, and a half a time" (Dan 7:25/Rev 12:14).
- ⇒ Daniel's prophecy parallels Matt 24, which are the specifics of God dealing with **Israel**. Daniel's prophecy includes the specifics of the antichrist's covenant with Israel, and then his defiling of the temple "On the wing of abominations...one who makes desolate (Dan 9:25-27). This is clearly a peace treaty with Israel during the 70<sup>th</sup> week of the vision.
- ⇒ "Abomination of Desolation" (Matt 24:15), not that of 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. when the Seleucid King, Antiochus Epiphanes sacked Jerusalem and sacrificed a pig on the altar, but that of the yet future event during the reign of antichrist.
- ⇒ If Daniel is dealing with Israel during the tribulation, then Matthew 24 is the same.

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- ⇒ Jer 30:7 – “the time of Jacob’s trouble” – indicating that ethnic Israel is being dealt with during the tribulation so that the non-elect can be judged and the remnant may be brought in (cf. Rom 11:24-26).
- ⇒ In fact, if Revelation 12 is a “snapshot” of the entire 7 year tribulation, it is clear that the antichrist’s hatred is centered on Israel.

### B. The Church is Promised Deliverance

Some texts strongly suggest that the church is to be delivered from the tribulation and its features of divine judgment –

All of the tribulation views agree that God’s people are not under the judgment of God, and therefore **cannot be the intended recipients** of His outpoured wrath.

All views also agree that throughout her history, and until Christ returns, the church has and will continue to experience persecutions & afflictions.

If the church is delivered from the time of God’s outpoured wrath upon the wicked of the earth, on what grounds?

It can’t be that because of the atonement of Christ believers are exempt from the tribulation, because those who are saved during the tribulation are also under the blood of Christ, yet all will experience the effects of the global judgments and many will face death.

Why the exemption for those who are believers now?

There’s only one answer: Because this is what God promised to the church, and often stated it as **the foundation of the church’s hope, comfort, and holy living**. It would have to be a sovereign decision by God to remove pretribulation saints from the earth, because He has promised it for their present and future comfort...after which He would have a special plan for those whom He will save during the tribulation.

#### *The Bigger Redemptive Picture*

To look at it from the vantage point of redemptive history, in the beginning Adam was created in a state of innocent, untested holiness which set the stage for a ***unique manifestation*** of the kind of Creator God is. Adam fell into rebellion, bringing a constitutional corruption so total that mankind was lost forever and wholly condemnable.

God, desiring to display the perfection of His power, grace, mercy, love, and saving nature, mitigated the immediate and just penalty (death!) against Adam, offering the promise of salvation through divine sacrifice (Gen 3:15,21).

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At a later time, when the earth was filled with generations of idolatry and corruption, God, in His sovereignty, called Abraham out of wickedness, declaring an everlasting covenant with Him (Gen 12:1-3,7). It was a covenant of salvation blessing upon generations of sinners, ratified and upheld by God's power alone in spite of human inability. This was another *unique time wherein God manifested His saving nature* through His gracious choice of sinful Abraham.

Not long after, while God's chosen people were in bondage to slavery due to their own disobedience, God responded to their cries for help. They were continually unfaithful to the simplest commands from the Lord, but He was ever and always true to His promise to the forefathers. He raised up Moses as a deliverer and representative to God.

Through their covenant to obey God's holy law, Israel learned of the depth of sin and their need for a superior sacrifice that would not fade away. God was putting His holiness on display, and though Israel spent years in utter willful rebellion against her Master, He remained true in every dimension of His promise. This was yet another very *unique manifestation* of the glorious, unfailing perfection of God.

At the proper time in God's plan, His Son came to earth to fulfill His mission as the only and superior sacrifice for sin. He offered Himself to Israel as their only Savior who would forgive their sin, reconciling them to God. They repeatedly and vehemently denounced and blasphemed God's Son, after which they ultimately murdered Him.

The glory of God's perfections reached its revelatory zenith in the person and work of Jesus Christ on the cross. In His death, Jesus Christ manifested the glory of God's justice, mercy, condemnation of sin, forgiving grace, and immeasurable love in a fashion never before imagined, nor ever shall be.

In the perfect purposes of God, Israel had rejected and killed their Messiah. As a recognizable nation on the earth, they were sealed in their rebellion against Christ and judiciously "set aside" until the grace of God reached into all the nations of the earth with news of a Savior (Rom 11:25-32). Again, the present "time of the Gentiles" is *another unique manifestation* of the manifold grace of God extending to people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. His chosen servant Israel, temporarily hardened in unbelief, is an enemy of the true and living God until God's mercy reaches to countless others.

When this time of marvelous grace has uniquely displayed the glory of God for as long as He desires, then He will begin to declare His glory in an entirely new and fresh manner. While the unimaginable shower of judgments is reigning

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down upon the earth's godless inhabitants, the salvation of sinners will amazingly continue.

As God's mercy is displayed uniquely in the Church (during the time of the "fullness of the Gentiles"), so He plans *a unique time of unprecedented mercy and grace upon sinners* as He executes tribulation judgment on the earth.

Here are a few features of God's unique plan for those who are saved during the tribulation:

### **1. The Patience of God toward Tribulation Saints is Unique (as it has been toward the Gentiles after Israel's unbelief – Rom 11:25-32):**

Since tribulation saints are not believers at the time of the rapture (assuming for a moment the pretribulation view), but are saved after the judgments begin, they are another unique expression of God's boundless patience and initiating grace. Think of it...after generations of gospel witness through the church of Jesus Christ on earth (the "time of the Gentiles"), and so far two millennia of God's patient stay of judgment (2 Pet 3:9), men and women all over the globe have continued to reject Christ. In fact, the scriptures teach that as the last days approach evil will grow from bad to worse, false religions of self-worship will permeate society, and hostilities against believers will increase (2 Tim 3:1-12). If the Church is caught up and received by Christ just prior to the tribulation, then those who remain on the earth as the tribulation begins are still in rebellion against the gospel. God could rightfully judge at that moment! He could determine that once He finishes the time of the "fullness of the Gentiles" (Rom 11:25), that's it! No more opportunities for those who have rejected Christ and His Church over and over. Yet, multitudes of Christ-rejecters (Jew & Gentile) during the tribulation will be drawn by God, will repent and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, and will walk so faithfully as to incur the notice and swift fury of antichrist. How gracious of the Lord! How marvelous are His mercies!

Some may conclude from this if God will be saving people in the tribulation, why believe now? Why not simply live it up now, and when the rapture occurs quickly repent and be rescued?

Several thoughts make such reasoning nonsense:

⇒ Salvation is all of grace (Matt 13:11; John 1:12-13; 3:3; 6:44,65; Eph 2:8-10; 2 Tim 2:25-26), and therefore must not be presumed upon. We are to humbly cry out to Christ in repentance and faith, but it is God who must first grant such a regenerated heart and mind. Sinners should never

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presume upon God's call to believe. After all, He often further hardens the continually stubborn (Rom 1:24,26,28; cf. Matt 13:11).

- ⇒ Length of life is uncertain (Luke 12:16-20, 35-48), and it is foolish to imagine that death is far off with plenty of time to consider the gospel. Moreover, contrary to popular novels, there is no indication in scripture that massive numbers will believe in Christ as a result of the rapture (should it occur prior to the tribulation).
- ⇒ There is no guarantee of broken contrition. The tribulation's supernatural phenomena are no guarantee that sinners will be convinced of the truth. In fact, there is every indication that the vast majority, in spite of worldwide agreement that God's judgment has begun (Rev 6:16-17), will hate God all the more in hardened defiance (Rev 9:20-21; 11:7-10; 13:8; 16:8-9,11,21).

### 2. The Affliction & Endurance of Tribulation Saints is Unique:

The slaughter of believers during the tribulation will be **unprecedented!** The saints who have been killed through the ages, from OT to NT will not match the bloodbath of this 7 year period!

- ⇒ Matt 24:21-22 - *“For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short.”*
- ⇒ Rev 6:3-11 - By the time the 4<sup>th</sup> seal judgment is opened, multitudes of new believers had already been slaughtered.
- ⇒ Rev 9:9-17 - Just before the 7<sup>th</sup> seal is opened and the Trumpet judgments begin, an innumerable host of martyred saints are already serving God at His throne.
- ⇒ Rev 12:17; 13:7 - Multitudes more of the saints are overtaken and killed.
- ⇒ Rev 13:8-17 - Believers are compelled to either worship the beast or die! They are all given the mark (v16) or killed on the spot; They must take the mark, or else starve in hiding, or be killed on the spot (v17). How many died this way? Rev 15:2 indicates they couldn't be counted. Some will survive, and represent those who enter the earthly kingdom of Christ in non-glorified bodies.
- ⇒ Rev 16:5-6 - *“And I heard the angel of the waters saying, ‘Righteous are You, who is and who was, O holy One, because You did judge these things; for they*

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*poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it.”*

⇒ Rev 17:6 – *“And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.”*

Jesus made it clear that the tribulation period will be a frightening time for believers unlike anything in the history of mankind (Matt 24:21). One reason is that so many saints, brand new in the faith, will pay the ultimate price! Indeed, while the church today suffers indescribable persecution and martyrdom all over the world, the horrors of the tribulation’s bloodshed will overshadow it all, yet God’s children who’ve recently come to faith will endure. What a testimony to His power! Every tribulation saint who endures to the end in the face of such horrors vindicates the name, character, and promises of Almighty God.

It may also be true that all who embrace Christ do so before the bowl judgments which are poured out in rapid succession near the end of the seven years (Rev 15:1). As each bowl is poured out on the wicked of the earth, the death and destruction are of a massive scale, and only blasphemers are the visible recipients at this point (Rev 16:1-21).

### 3. The Witness of Tribulation Saints is Unique:

- ◆ Rev 7:3-17 – Sealed by God’s power; Honored by the Lamb’s guidance and presence
- ◆ Rev 11:3-13 – The two witnesses cause hardened Christ-haters to give glory to God.
- ◆ Rev 12:10-11 – They overcome the satanic onslaught and render evil powerless (see point #2 above).
- ◆ Rev 12:17 – They demonstrate the faithfulness of God’s saving power in that they “keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.”
- ◆ Rev 14:4-5 – They are able to stand in extraordinary purity and integrity despite the horrors against them.
- ◆ Rev 14:12-13 – They exercise a very unique level of perseverance. Their ability to stand up under such evil receives special blessing and recognition.

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- ◆ Rev 15:3-4 – They put the power, majesty, and holiness of God on display with special vividness.

### 4. The Prayers of the Tribulation Saints are Unique:

- ◆ Rev 6:9-11 – They have a just case against their killers, calling for an impending retribution from the Lord, which is received and accepted as righteous and worthy.
- ◆ Rev 8:3-6 – Their prayers prepare the angels to sound the trumpet judgments.
- ◆ Rev 18:20 – Their prayers bring another level of praise because God does indeed act in fitting judgment!

In conclusion, those who are saved during the tribulation have a unique purpose in the redemptive plan of God. Will it involve the horrors of the tribulation? Most definitely yes! Will they be given a special grace to endure it? It seems more so than the Church has needed during the time of the Gentiles.

Let's turn our attention to the texts that seem to promise that the church should remain comforted, holy, and alert, knowing that the Lord is returning soon at an undisclosed time to receive His Church, and to begin judging the wicked who dwell on the earth.

In the various texts where this is promised, the almost synonymous terms for wrath (**orgē**, & **thumos**) are used in contrast to the everyday trials and persecutions experienced by the church at the present time.

What we're concerned about in this study is *eschatological (end-times) wrath*...

There are only two times in the future where **orgē** factors in: (1) During the tribulation; (2) In the final judgment.

### 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

In the previous verses at the end of Chapter 4, Paul settles the Thessalonian fears about loved ones who have died in Christ. They thought that dying would cause a believer to miss the appearing of Christ in all His glory, and therefore they'd somehow miss sharing in its promises.

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Paul helps them understand that there is no essential difference between the living and the dead when Christ comes to glorify His people.

In the next 11 verses (5:1-11), Paul gives a synopsis of what he'd already taught extensively on the Lord's return in judgment. They obviously had asked questions about the timing and specific markers that would help them interpret what was going on around them. What Paul does here is gives them Three More End-Times Encouragements...

I. A Refresher in End-Times Study (vv1-3)

II. A Reminder That Believers Will Escape (vv4-10)

III. A Reiteration to Respond Accordingly

Now, let me say a word about the original language here...

In v1, we have the word "Now...". This is the normal "connective" used in the NT when the writer is transitioning to a different subject within the same overall category.

In other words, within the topic of future events, Paul is transitioning from the certainty of God's people being "caught up," to the uncertain and sudden timing of the coming judgment upon the wicked.

**Peri. de. -**

Matt 22:30-31 - "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage...But (peri de) regarding the resurrection of the dead,..."

Same topic (resurrection), different aspect (resurrection power)

Matt 24:32-44 - "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But (peri de) of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone."

Same general topic (the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ), different phase or aspect (the unexpected and sudden beginning of His appearing)

1 Thess 5:1 - Same topic (future events), different issue, or phase, or aspect (the unexpected and sudden onslaught of judgment)

End-Times Encouragement (I) -

I. A Refresher in End-Times Study (vv1-3)

Paul begins by taking the Thessalonians back to the clear truths they had been taught while Paul was with them.

First of all, he tells them...

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### A. Appropriate what you've been taught (vv1-2a)

#### 1. They knew about chronology and characteristics (v1a)

"...as to the times and the epochs"

**tw/n cro,nwn kai. tw/n kairw/n**

These are somewhat synonymous terms, but they do not convey exactly the same thing. Together they carry the idea of "timeframes and characteristics." The first term calls to mind the timing and duration, and the second term deals with the distinguishing marks.

Both terms are plural here, indicating that the one is dealing with the timing of all the events surrounding the coming of Christ, while the other is concerned with the nature of the events themselves.

The Thessalonians already knew what they needed for adequate clarification and comfort.

#### 2. Their doctrine was given accurately (vv1b-2a)

"For you yourselves know full well"

Again, they had been clearly taught what Paul is about to highlight. There was no need for extensive supplemental material as to the timing of the Day of the Lord, nor as to the distinguishing characteristics of its surrounding events.

What did they know so well?

### B. The "Day" will come unexpectedly (vv2b-3)

First, that the "Day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night"

"Day of the Lord"

No article here, placing the emphasis on who's Day it is - The Lord's

[Mayhue's data on "the day of the Lord" passages]

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Clearly here, the judgment aspect of the Day of the Lord is what Paul has in mind.

1. Thief-like - "...just like a thief in the night"

Lit. - "The Day of the Lord as a thief in the night thus comes"

This construction gives strong emphasis to the parallel "suddenness" and "unexpectedness" of the thief and "the Day."

Paul's point is not that the Lord comes like a thief, but that just as a robber descends upon your goods at night when you are asleep and not expecting it, so the Day of the Lord will begin at an equally unpredictable time.

2. Upon the duped - "While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!'"

This phrase is closely connected with the previous, conveying the idea that while the unbelieving world (contrasted with those in v4) is totally deceived in their own selfish pursuits disregarding the Lord's return, the "Day" of judgment will begin to fall on them.

They have a false sense of security.

But "destruction [utter devastation and loss of all hope] will come upon them like birth pangs upon a woman with child"

"will come" is a verb form that carries the idea of a dark cloud looming over head, and about to explode upon them unexpectedly.

3. With foreboding - "...suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child"

Paul is using the same words that the OT and Jesus used to speak of the terrifying events that a part of the Day of the Lord.

Isaiah 13:8; 66:7

Jeremiah 30:7-8

Micah 4:9-10

Matt 24:8

4. No escape - "They shall not escape"

Lit. - "They will not escape, not at all!"

Who are they? The ones saying "peace & safety"

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The ones who are “in darkness”; who are “asleep” in the “night”; who are “drunk” in the “night”

Those who are living on the earth at the time of the onslaught are doomed!

### II. A Reminder That Believers Will Escape (vv4-10)

#### A. We are of opposite character (vv4-5)

##### 1. No darkness so as to be overtaken

No moral or spiritual ignorance or rebellion.

Those immersed in darkness will be “overtaken,” but not believers.

##### 2. Only light so as to escape

#### B. We are of opposite lifestyle (vv6-8)

##### 1. Called to spiritual alertness and sobriety

a. Because ignorance is of the darkness

b. Because recklessness is of the darkness

##### 2. Called to spiritual stability and hope

a. Desires guarded by faith and love

b. Mind guarded by divine promises

##### 1) Not destined for wrath

Believers are “appointed” for one thing, and not “appointed for another.

The “wrath” here, as in 1:10, is the wrath of God in the Day of the Lord which comes upon those in darkness.

His children are not “purposed for” the “sudden destruction” that falls upon the unsaved.

##### 2) Destined for salvation

a) Through Christ who died

b) That we may be with Him

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### III. A Reiteration To Respond Accordingly

#### A. Encourage

#### B. Build Up

Some may say...

Couldn't He simply preserve our salvation "through" this time of wrath?

He could, but from 1:10, 5:9, and Rev 3:10 (see below), it seems that God's people are to be comforted with the promise of deliverance at the beginning of the "hour of testing."

Pastor, if I accept that the church is "caught up" before the tribulation begins, why do the saints in the tribulation have to go through it if God has not destined us for such things?

Remember, after the rapture there will be no saints on earth. As the seal judgments begin, all of God's wrath is falling rightly upon the wicked of the earth. So it is a mistake to see believers today the same as those whom God saves during the tribulation.

We receive comfort today from the knowledge that Jesus Christ will rescue His children who belong to Him. We are charged to live holy lives so that we are not weak and under chastening when Christ comes for His own.

When the tribulation judgments begin, God will again begin saving others who come to Him during the time of terrible wrath falling upon the earth. Their place in the plan of God is special, as we saw in our last study.

### **REV 3:10** - "I will keep you from the hour of testing"

The nature of the protection - Ek - "out of"

Tereso - "Preserve" or "Protect"

Postributionalists argue that the phrase simply means "to preserve from within"

i.e. the Church will be "kept from" the time of tribulation by being "preserved through it"

Does tereso ek mean that the Church will be preserved from within the tribulation, or that the Church will be preserved "outside of" the tribulation?

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Robert Gundry argues that since “ek” is a preposition of motion, it must mean “preserved from within,” indicating that the church will be within the tribulation but “kept from” its horrors.

However, the history of the meaning of “ek” quite frequently speaks of a position “outside of” its object with no concept of being preserved through from within:

Secular documents have used the preposition to indicate being “kept completely out of” something.

In the Septuagint, the usage in Prov 21:23 takes the same sense: “The one who guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from trouble.”

Here, there is no prior existence of the soul within “trouble,” nor is there the idea of preserving the soul through trouble.

This same usage appears in a number of other OT passages:

Joshua 2:13, Ps 33:19, 56:13, Prov 23:14...

In the NT, we find similar evidence of this usage:

Acts 15:29 – The Gentiles are told to “keep themselves from practices that offend the Jews.” They are not already doing these things, but are told to never start doing them. They are to “keep from” them altogether.

John 12:27 – (same author as Revelation) Jesus prays, “Father, save Me from this hour” – Did He mean preserve Me within and through the cross? Or did He mean keep Me from it altogether?

We know from the synoptics that Jesus pleaded with the Father to “let this cup pass from” Him (Matt 26:39; Lk 22:42). Therefore, Jesus is asking to be completely kept from the hour of His death, but then simply obeys and affirms “not My will, but Yours be done.”

John 17:15 – (the Lord speaking, penned by John) “Keep them from the Evil One” – Clearly, the disciples were not in the evil one at the time of the prayer, so Jesus is calling for them to be preserved completely away from Satan’s grip.

Also...

“the hour of testing”

This promise relates to a specific time – a well-known time of referenced trouble.

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So the promise is that of total preservation away from a specific period of time. We simply cannot get around the force of this grammar. Exemption from a period of trial is the clear substance of this promise.

What is this time?

“That hour which is about to come upon the whole world”

“Hora” – “the divinely appointed time for the actualization of apocalyptic happenings” (Delling). The presence of the article (“the”) indicates that this is a well-referenced hour.

“which is about to come upon the whole world” – This is a global event as opposed to localized times of testing (cf. Rev 2:10).

“To test those who dwell upon the earth” – “peirazo” – “to test” and find the essence. The idea here is that the wrath of God is about to come upon “earth-dwellers” to expose and judge the unbelief and rebellion of the unregenerate who are on the earth.

“earth-dwellers” – 7X in Revelation – In all cases, it refers to those whose names are not found in the book of life (13:8;17:8).

It seems clear that this is a definitive promise to those in the Church who have “kept My word, and have not denied My name,” that they will be “kept out of” the particular “hour of testing” meant for those who are the wicked on the earth.

### IMMINENT RETURN OR A SEARCH FOR SIGNS?

#### *Jesus Teaches an Unexpected Return*

Luke 12:35-48

Two Images: (1) The Master at the door knocking; (2) The thief plundering unexpectedly

Both parables speak of “blessing” for those who are prepared, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> parable talks of judgment on the unprepared.

Matthew 24:36-25:30 –

Jesus says that day is “Unexpected” (vv36-44)

Jesus says we are to faithfully serve because it will be soon (vv45-51)

Jesus says we should be alert (25:1-13)

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Jesus says we should be obedient and responsible (25:14-30)

### *NT emphasis on Imminence:*

James 5:1-11 (circa A.D. 40's)

Judgment is imminent (vv1-6) – Beware!

Christ's coming is imminent (vv7-11) – Be Ready!

2 Pet 3:10 – (circa A.D. 60's)

Christ's arrival is imminent – Mockers should repent; The faithful should persevere.

1 Thess 5:2-3 – “Like a thief”

1 Thess 1:10 – “the coming wrath” – “erchomenes” – Present tense but used in a futuristic sense...may indicate that this is a wrath that is very close and could come at any moment!

1 Thess 2:16 – “Now wrath has come upon them fully”

Past tense is used to speak of it being right on the threshold. Similar to Matt 12:28, where Jesus uses the same phrase to describe the arrival of the kingdom, “the kingdom of God has come upon you.” In other words, it is so very close as to be right on the threshold!

What about the signs of Matt 24?

The “signs” of Christ's coming to the earth in judgment are very clear and should not be missed – If they are so clear, why have so many in history who “look for signs” thought that Jesus' coming was upon us?

The generation who sees the “leaf of the fig tree” start to bud, that is the same generation that will watch the swift judgments and coming.

2 Thess 2 –

Does the man of lawlessness have to be revealed before the rapture and Christ's coming?

No to the 1<sup>st</sup> part, Yes to the 2<sup>nd</sup> part.

Possible situations regarding what the Thessalonians thought:

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- i. They were being told they were in the Day of the Lord, and that the rapture would come at the end (Postrib).

If true, the Thessalonians would've rejoiced because the rapture was very soon. Instead, they were frightened about being in the Day of the Lord judgments.

- ii. They were being told they were in the Day of the Lord, and that the rapture already happened.

If true, then Paul and many others had obviously missed the rapture.

- iii. They were being told they were in the Day of the Lord and that Paul was wrong about a rapture. There would be none at all.

I believe this is the accurate view of the situation...

If true, this is why Paul does not appeal to the rapture. Paul can't correct the error with special revelation about the rapture (1 Thess 4:15) if the false teachers denied it would happen. He would be accused of circular reasoning. So, instead of using the rapture's timing as a defense, he simply appeals to Daniel's prophecy and the man of lawlessness that will be revealed in the Day of the Lord.

Further, he used the man of lawlessness so that they would know that the last 3½ years hadn't come yet, and that it is dangerous to speculate about end-times by looking at the events of the day.

This view also explains why the Thessalonians were so distraught. If Paul was wrong about a rapture, then we have no comfort about being with the Lord in heaven during these coming judgements on earth.

Imminence was not the concern of Jesus because the church was not yet begun -

Imminence became the teaching of the early church -

Imminence refers to the "at any moment" coming of Christ waited upon by the church -

Jesus' parables highlighted the "suddenness" & "unexpectedness" of Christ's return

Matthew 24 -

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The “signs” of Christ’s coming to the earth in judgment are very clear and should not be missed –

The generation who sees the “leaf of the fig tree” start to bud, that is the same generation that will watch the swift judgments and coming.

2 Thess 2 is not a discussion about what comes before the rapture, but rather that the Day of the Lord couldn’t possibly have come because the Man of Lawlessness hadn’t been revealed yet.