

ETT 2019

Day One -- The Rapture

What I can prove

Proof: Christ is returning

Acts 1:1-11 – The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

9 And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up (*analambano*) from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

That becomes the basis of the Christian hope. The Blessed Hope –

Titus 2:11-14 -- For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to

redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

Facts: Grace brings salvation to all men (not just Jews). As a result, we deny ungodliness and worldly desires and we live righteously in this present age. AND we look forward to the “blessed hope” of final salvation that will happen when our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, redeems us utterly and complete from all our sin and purifies us for Himself. And we, in response to that saving work, are zealous to do good deeds.

Next fact: Of necessity, there is a resurrection to come. But, and this is a great mystery, not everyone will have to die to participate.

1 Corinthians 15:20-26 -- But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

1 Corinthians 15:35-49 -- But someone will say, “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?” You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in

dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So also it is written, "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.

50-57 -- Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

So far: Christ is returning and at His return, some people will not die but will be changed so that we are suitable for "kingdom of God."

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Great time to be alive – when the Lord returns. But what about the people who aren't alive then? Will they miss it?

Now add this bit of information --

1Th. 4:13-18 -- But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who

are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

That event, the catching up of remaining and living church to meet Christ in the clouds of the air, is what we call **the rapture**.

Define terms: **Rapture** is a state or experience of being carried away.

The Greek word it translates is *harpazo*, which means to snatch out or take away.

to seize, carry off by force
to seize on, eagerly claim for one's self
We are passive in the *harpazo* process.

The Latin translation of this verse used the word *rapturo*.

The Latin word, *rapio*, which means to seize or snatch in relation to an ecstasy of spirit or the actual removal from one place to another.

In other words, it means to be carried away in spirit or in body.

The Rapture of the church means the carrying away of the church from earth to heaven.

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New Testament occurrences of *harpazo* --

Mat 13:19 -- When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and snatches away (*harpazo*) that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

John 6:15 -- When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force (*harpazo*), to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.

John 10:12 -- But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them (*harpazo*), and scattereth the sheep.

John 10:28-29 – And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out (*harpazo*) of my hand. 29 My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

Acts 23:10 -- And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force (*harpazo*) from among them, and to bring him into the castle.

Jude 1: 23 -- save others, snatching them out (*harpazo*) of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

Does God ever do that to people?

Answer: Yes, indeed.

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Other occurrences of word “harpazo” –

Acts 8:34-40 -- The eunuch answered Philip and said, “Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?” Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?” [And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”] And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched (*harpazo*) Philip (*Philippus*) away

(*harpazo*); and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.

2Corinthians 12:2-4 -- I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up (*harpazo*) to the third heaven. And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows— was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.

Rev 12:3-5 -- Then another sign appeared in the sky; it was a huge red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadems. ⁴Its tail swept away a third of the stars in the sky and hurled them down to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth. ⁵She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up (*harpazo*) to God and his throne.

Thus there can be no doubt that the word is used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 to indicate the actual removal of people from earth to heaven.

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So, God clearly snatches people away, some to Heaven, but did this begin in the New Testament?

No.

Old Testament events of people being gathered away to Heaven.

Genesis 5:18-24 -- Jared lived one hundred and sixty-two years, and became the father of Enoch. Then Jared lived eight hundred years after he became the father of Enoch, and he had other sons and daughters. So all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years, **and he died**. Enoch lived sixty-five years, and became the father of MethuSelah.

Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of MethuSelah, and he had other sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.

New Testament commentary on that event --

Hebrews 11:5-6 -- By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death; **AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP**; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God. And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Elijah – (notice it is a predicted, known event)

2Kings 2:1-14 – And it came about when the Lord was about to take up Elijah by a whirlwind to heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here please, for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel. Then the sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, “Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from over you today?” And he said, “Yes, I know; be still.”

4 Elijah said to him, “Elisha, please stay here, for the Lord has sent me to Jericho.” But he said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they came to Jericho. The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho approached Elisha and said to him, “Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from over you today?” And he answered, “Yes, I know; be still.” Then Elijah said to him, “Please stay here, for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.” And he said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them went on.

7 Now fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood opposite them at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan. Elijah took his mantle and folded it together and struck the waters, and they were divided here and there, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground.

9 When they had crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha, “Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you.” And Elisha said, “Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me.” He said, “You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so.” As they were going along and talking, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven.

12 Elisha saw it and cried out, “My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” And he saw Elijah no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. He also took up the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and returned and stood by the bank of the Jordan. He took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and struck the waters and said, “Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?” And when he also had struck the waters, they were divided here and there; and Elisha crossed over.

Back to 1Thessalonians --

1Thess 4:15-17 -- 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up (*harpazo*) together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

Thus there can be no doubt that the word is used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 to indicate the actual removal of people from earth to heaven.

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SO WHEN?

Pre- post- millennial, tribulational. For me, it comes down to this:

2Thessaloninas 2:1-4 -- Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be

disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy (*apostasía/departure*) comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

Apostasia – definition vs. connotation and assumption

(strong's) *apostasía* (from 868 /*aphístēmi*, "leave, depart," which is derived from *apó*, "away from" and /*histēmi*, "stand") – properly, departure (implying desertion); apostasy – literally, "a leaving, from a previous standing."

The King James translators rendered it, "except there come a falling away first."

Our English word "apostasy" is a transliteration of that Greek word, "apostasía."

However - and this is a very important point – the Greek term simply means "to stand or be placed away." The equivalent English term would be "departure." Who is departing and where they are departing from is determined by the context.

Apostasy is a real thing. When writing to Timothy, Paul did warn that in the last days there would be those who would depart from the true faith --

1Tim.4:1-2 -- But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away [*aphístēmi* - *the verb form of apostasia*] from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron."

As a result, the English word "apostasy" has taken on the meaning of falling away or departing from the Christian faith. However, it's Greek counterpart simply designates a departure. And when the noun appears by itself, without a direct reference to who or what they are

departing from or to, the focus is on the departure itself, rather than the act of departing.

In the New Testament, the only other occurrence of the Greek noun “apostasia” is in Acts 21:21 –

... and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake [apostasia] Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.

The translator’s choice of “forsake” is equivalent with “depart” or “stand away from.” The object of the departure is the Law of Moses. But, the word “apostasia” designates only the departure, not the object being forsaken.

The first seven English translations of the Bible -- Wycliffe Bible (1384); Tyndale Bible (1526); Coverdale Bible (1535); Cranmer Bible (1539); Breeches Bible (1576); Beza Bible (1583); Geneva Bible (1608) -- translated the word apostasia as either "departure" or "departing."

The Lidell and Scott Greek Lexicon defines apostasia first as a defection or revolt, then secondly as departure or disappearance.

When considering the context of the surrounding passages of 2 Thess. 2:3-8, we can see the word apostasia truly means departure or disappearance.

Jerome's Latin Vulgate from around the time of 400 A.D. renders apostasia as "discessio", meaning departure.

King James Version was the first to change the established translation of "departure" which unfortunately continued in all following English translations.

So, because the translation “apostasy” has become so well known, the common thinking is to simply assume that Paul forewarned of a falling away from the faith as a signal of the appearance of the man of lawlessness.

The Debate

In that passage there are at least four views on the meaning of apostasia: (1) a designation for the Man of Sin (Chrysostom, Theophylact, Augustine, Alford, Moffatt); (2) the religious apostasy that will precede the Second Coming of Christ (Calvin, Chafer, Walvoord, Ryrie, Gundry); (3) the religious-political rebellion against Christ that will culminate in the Battle of Armageddon (Hogg, Vine, Moore, Morris, Bruce); and (4) the rapture of the Church, in the sense of physical departure from the earth (English, Wuest, House, Ice).

So, how are we to determine which translation is correct? After all, this is a pretty big deal, especially since Paul said that this occurrence had to predate the appearance of the man of sin. It's an important indicator.

Context determines meaning.

In the immediate context of 2 Thessalonians, Paul had just appealed to his readers "with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him."

Consequently, in Kenneth Wuest's expanded translation of the New Testament, he considers the force and direction of Paul's argument to determine the particular meaning of the word "apostasia." Here is Wuest's translation of these verses, verbatim, including the parentheses:

"Do not begin to allow anyone to lead you astray in any way, because that day shall not come except the aforementioned departure (of the church to Heaven) comes first and the man of the lawlessness is disclosed (in his true identity), and exalts himself above everyone and everything that is called a god or that is an object of worship, so that he seats himself in the inner sanctuary of God, proclaiming himself to be deity." i

There is continuity between verses 1-2 and 3-4. And there is a similar consistency as Paul continues his argument. In verses 3-4 we read that first comes the departure. Then the man of lawlessness is

revealed, who then sets himself up in the temple, showing himself that he is God. That is the order -- according to Paul.

In verse 5 he reminds his readers that he had already told them these things when he was present among them. Then, in verses 6-8 he forms another chronos, another set of events that happen in order.

2Thess. 2:6-8 -- And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming.

In this instance, the order of events includes: the restrainer is restraining and will do so until the restraint is removed, or taken out of the way. After that removal, then the lawless one is revealed. Then the Lord will appear and slay him.

So, compare the events listed in verses 3-4, they parallel the events in verses 6-8.

In each case, the man of lawlessness is revealed after the departure and/or the removal of the restrainer. As we saw above, the most direct referent to the departure is the gathering of the church mentioned in verses 1-2. In that case, the departure of the church is synonymous with the removal of the restraint that is holding the mystery of lawlessness at bay until his set time. The context is consistent. As Dr. Wuest explains --

The English word departure certainly fits the context (or coherency) of 2 Thessalonians 2:3-8. Most post-tribulation theologians refuse to address the entire context as it is given, and thus insist the lexical evidence does not suggest a physical departure. But that is exactly what the lexical evidence does suggest. Dismissing the obvious coherence in those passages would be simple ignorance or a stubborn refusal to consider the Scriptural evidence. Remember, if we take a word out of context and apply a dissimilar meaning, we have then created a new pre-text. Likely that happened in the translation in the King James and later versions. ii

In summary: When we read the phrase “for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first” Paul is only telling us that there will be a departure prior to the man of sin being revealed. To conclude that the departure Paul’s referencing is a departure from the faith is to read into Paul’s words meaning that he did not intend. Who is departing and what they are departing from is established by the larger context.

Remember that the primary point of Paul’s treatise is to unify his audience around “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him.” First he assured them that they should not be persuaded by any means that the Day of Christ was at hand. As his first proof he reminded them that that day could not come until there was first a departure and then the man of sin was revealed. The object of the “apostasia,” then, can only be church as it departs to meet the Lord in the air, removing the restraining that is keeping the mystery of lawlessness at bay until his appointed time.

ⁱ Wuest, Kenneth. The New Testament; An Expanded Translation. (Grand Rapids, Mi. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Reprinted 1989) p.486

ⁱⁱ Wuest, Kenneth. Quoted by Tim Osterholm. The Pre-Tribulation Rapture; A Self-Evident Promise. <http://www.soundchristian.com/prophecy/#rapture4>

Day Three: The Great Tribulation

The Greek word translated “tribulation” is “*thlipsis*” (*θλίψις*). “*Thlipsis*” is derived from the word “*thlibo*”-- meaning to crush, press, compress or squeeze. Thus, “*thlipsis*” indicates grievous affliction or distress.

The word “tribulation” is a transliteration of the Latin “tribulum.” It connotes images of a person beating a rug to remove the dust, or beating wheat with a rod to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Christ said that this squeezing, as well as this removing of dust and chaff through chastening, is part of the Christian journey:

“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation (*thlipsis*), but take courage; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

However, this common trouble is not to be confused with “*thlipsis megas*” -- “tribulation the great”.

“For then there will be a great tribulation (*megas thlipsis*), such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.” (Matt. 24:21)

That is a time of trouble unlike any other time and any other trouble. It is the period of Daniel’s 70th week, expanded and described in the book of Revelation. It is, specifically, the last 3½ years of this present age before Jesus returns to set up His kingdom that shall never be destroyed.

When Daniel received his angelic vision of the “70 weeks,” he had been reading from the book of Jeremiah and came to realize that Israel’s 70 years of desolation were about to come to a conclusion. And, certainly enough, at the end of the desolation the children of Israel, by the decree of Cyrus and later by Artaxerxes, returned to rebuild the temple, and eventually Jerusalem.

2Chron. 36:20-23 -- Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete. Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia — in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah — the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also *put it* in writing,

saying, "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!'"

The prophecies of Jeremiah were both accurate and literal; the details and the exact numbers played-out in sequence. Importantly, the ministry of the prophet Jeremiah was specifically to the tribes of Israel and Judah. It is in that framework we find the following prophecy:

Jer. 30: 1-3 -- The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book. For behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah.' The LORD says, 'I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers and they shall possess it.'"

Terrific! The dispersed members of Judah and Israel will return to the land they have always held as a gift promised to Abraham, Isaac and their descendants. But, then the prophecy takes a dark turn:

Jer.30:4-6 -- Now these are the words which the LORD spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah: "For thus says the LORD, 'I have heard a sound of terror, of dread, and there is no peace. 'Ask now, and see if a male can give birth. Why do I see every man *with* his hands on his loins, as a woman in childbirth? And *why* have all faces turned pale?'"

Why?

"Alas! for that day is great, there is none like it; And it is the time of Jacob's distress, but he will be saved from it." (v.7)

Jeremiah foresaw a time so terrible that it can truly be said that no other time is like it.

Notice that the day of trouble is called "Jacob's trouble" or "Jacob's distress." Jacob was the original name of the progenitor of the Jewish nations, whose name was later changed by an angel of the Lord, to Israel - "prince who has power with God" (Gen. 32:28). Jacob will be saved from it!

Daniel also foresaw this same day and provides a further clue to its time frame. In the last chapter of his book, after he has listed the horrors that the "little horn" will undertake, detailing the battles and attacks against Jerusalem, Daniel says:

“Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands *guard* over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt ... But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time.” (Dan.12:1-2,4a)

And, once again, the events are to be sealed up until “the end of time.” That ought to be sufficient to convince us that this time of trouble has yet to occur.

SO --

In Matthew 24, the disciples of Jesus asked Him what would be the signs of the end of the age and of His coming. He answered by saying that they were to take heed that they not be deceived by the false Christs who would appear and deceive many. They would hear of wars and rumors of wars, nations rising against nations, kingdoms against kingdoms, famines, pestilence and earthquakes in various places. But, these are just the “beginning of birth pains” (Matt. 24:8). These birth pains -- the Greek “odin” (*ὀδίν*) -- that Christ included in His description of the signs of His return are a direct parallel to Jeremiah’s description of these selfsame days.

Christ went on to say that many would be afflicted, killed, and hated for their testimony of the name of Christ. Men will betray each other, false prophets will arise, iniquity will abound and the love of many will wax cold. But, some will endure to the end and be saved. And, the gospel of the kingdom will be preached to the entire world for a witness to all (or, against all) the nations and then the end shall come.

Mat.24:15-20 - “Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath.”

The references to Daniel’s prophecy, Judea and the Sabbath make this an undeniably Jewish/Israelite instruction. And, where are they to flee? Just “to the mountains”? No, Christ already gave his audience their clue -- Daniel’s “abomination of desolation”:

“He will also enter the Beautiful Land, and many *countries* will fall; but these will be rescued out of his hand: Edom, Moab and the foremost of the sons of Ammon.” (Dan.11:41)

They were on the eastern shore of the Dead, or Salt, Sea, ensconced in a mountain range. Ammon is to the northeast of the sea, Moab is due east, and Edom is southeast. This is the area that God has set aside for the purpose of protecting His chosen people from the onslaught of the armies of the “little horn.”

But, why the rush? What’s the big hurry that would preclude even returning to the house to grab a coat? Why should nursing women be concerned? And, why worry about the weather?

Mat.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 will. Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”

Jesus predicted the same event foretold by Jeremiah and Daniel, using the same language. It was future to Jesus and it remains future to us. Either that or we must uncover some event that occurred between Jesus’ ministry and today that adequately fulfills this prophecy.

Identifying the Elect

His ministry, Jesus made several references to “the elect.” Not only did He say that the days of trouble would be shortened for the elect’s sake, He equally prophesied that the miraculous signs and wonders to be performed by “false Christs and false prophets” would be so effective that they would even deceive the elect, if such a thing were possible (Matt. 24:24). When the “sign of the Son of Man” appears in the heavens, as the tribes of the earth are mourning, Jesus will send His angels with the sound of a great trumpet to gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other (Matt. 24:31). These same statements appear in Mark’s gospel. And Luke records Jesus’ parable of the unjust judge, including the summary statement, “Now shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?” (Luke 18:7)

Jesus spoke openly and frequently of “the elect.” Unfortunately, the failure to understand Jesus’ words in their proper context has led to several errant eschatological schemes. For instance, those folk who contend that the Church (redeemed believers from every kindred, tribe, tongue and nation) will be present on Earth during the time of Jacob’s trouble point to Jesus’ statement that its

duration will be shortened for the elect's sake. They assume -- wrongly -- that Jesus was referring to the Church when He mentioned the "elect."

But what would Christ's original listening audience have understood Him to be saying? Remember that Jesus was walking and teaching among the Jews, primarily. He was perfectly clear in declaring, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matt. 15:24) Although Gentiles sought and occasionally conversed with Him, His target audience was Israel. They would have understood Him to be speaking of them! After all, in their Scripture they were identified exactly that way:

O seed of Israel His servant, sons of Jacob, His chosen ones! (1Chron. 16:13)

O seed of Abraham, His servant, O sons of Jacob, His chosen ones! (Psa. 105:6)

For the LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His own possession. (Psa. 135:4)

"But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, descendant of Abraham My friend ..." (Isa. 41:8)

"But now listen, O Jacob, My servant; And Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus says the LORD who made you and formed you from the womb, who will help you, Do not fear, O Jacob My servant; And you Jeshurun whom I have chosen." (Isa. 44:1-2)

"For the sake of Jacob My servant, and Israel My chosen (*KJV: Mine elect*), I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor, though you have not known Me." (Isa. 45:4)

"And I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, and an heir of My mountains from Judah; Even My chosen ones shall inherit it, and My servants shall dwell there." (Isa. 65:9)

Israel's Scripture (what we call the Old Testament) was the only frame-of-reference available to Jesus' target audience. And those Scripture are unflinchingly clear in identifying Israel as God's chosen, elect people.

Titus

Preterism -- points to the destruction of Jerusalem and the tearing down of the temple in 70 AD as the particular cataclysmic event that Jesus was describing in Matthew 24. They find in Titus, the Roman general (and later emperor) who led

the invasion and destruction, the person they define as the “little horn”, thus wrapping up the loose ends and neatly pushing all prophecy into the past.

It’s a tempting conclusion inasmuch as Jesus was inarguably referring to those events early in His discourse:

And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. And He answered and said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down.” (Matt. 24:1-2)

It was truly a horrific event as the walls were razed to the ground and the temple was set ablaze. Josephus claims that 1,100,000 people were killed during the siege, of which a majority were Jewish, and that 97,000 were captured and enslaved --

"The slaughter within was even more dreadful than the spectacle from without. Men and women, old and young, insurgents and priests, those who fought and those who entreated mercy, were hewn down in indiscriminate carnage. The number of the slain exceeded that of the slayers. The legionaries had to clamber over heaps of dead to carry on the work of extermination." ⁱⁱ

Nevertheless, despite the horror and inarguable prophetic fulfillment involved in that event, it is an enormous stretch of even the most fervent imagination to conclude that the destruction of Jerusalem was indeed the “great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.”

Certainly after the Dark Ages, the Inquisition, the Crusades, two World Wars, and the Holocaust (which reportedly took the lives of 3,000,000 Jews), it’s hard to imagine that none of those events was on par with Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Nor is Titus the embodiment of the “little horn.”

Neither “this age” came to its conclusion, nor did Christ return in visible clouds of glory when Jerusalem fell. Titus was undoubtedly a tool in the hand of a sovereign God to accomplish Christ’s word concerning the temple. But, then he was removed from the stage of history.

The 29th verse of Matthew 24 ought to be sufficient to convince us of that fact:

“But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE

STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory." (Matt. 24:29-30)

Unless these particular events – the sun and moon darkened, stars falling from heaven, all the tribes of the earth mourning as they witness the sign of Christ as He comes in the clouds of Heaven with power and glory - can be historically located and connected with Titus, he is not the man of whom Daniel and Jesus spoke. And the Great Tribulation has yet to occur.

The Day of the Lord

The Day of the Lord is a phrase that designates God's intervention into time and space in order to pour out His wrath. The phrase is used in the OT ... but it is also used in the NT to designate how bad the Great Tribulation is going to be.

It is a time truly unlike any time that has gone before:

That terrifying description of God's anger and unrestrained punishment is just the beginning. Descriptions of righteous, Heavenly judgment, complete destruction and earthly lamenting run throughout scripture. And they are most always connected to The Day of the Lord.

Joel 1:13-15 -- Gird yourselves *with sackcloth* and lament, O priests; Wail, O ministers of the altar! Come, spend the night in sackcloth O ministers of my God, For the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. Consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly; Gather the elders *and* all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God, And cry out to the LORD. Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty.

Joel 2:1-2 -- Blow a trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; Surely it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, *so* there is a great and mighty people; There has never been *anything* like it, Nor will there be again after it to the years of many generations.

Joel 2:7-11 -- They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like soldiers; And they each march in line, nor do they deviate from their paths. They do not crowd each other, they march everyone in his

path; When they burst through the defenses, they do not break ranks. They rush on the city, they run on the wall; they climb into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief. Before them the earth quakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness. The LORD utters His voice before His army; Surely His camp is very great, for strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it?

Amos 5:16-20 -- Therefore thus says the LORD God of hosts, the Lord, "There is wailing in all the plazas, And in all the streets they say, 'Alas! Alas!' They also call the farmer to mourning and professional mourners to lamentation. And in all the vineyards *there is* wailing, because I will pass through the midst of you," says the LORD. Alas, you who are longing for the day of the LORD, for what purpose *will* the day of the LORD *be* to you? It *will be* darkness and not light; As when a man flees from a lion And a bear meets him, Or goes home, leans his hand against the wall And a snake bites him. *Will* not the day of the LORD *be* darkness instead of light, even gloom with no brightness in it?"

Zeph.1:14-18 -- Near is the great day of the LORD, near and coming very quickly; Listen, the day of the LORD! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. A day of wrath is that day, a day of trouble and distress, a day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and the high corner towers. I will bring distress on men so that they will walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the LORD; And their blood will be poured out like dust and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the LORD'S wrath; And all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy, for He will make a complete end, indeed a terrifying one, of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Are you getting a feel for this? There are also references to that day in Zechariah and Malachi. They convey a similar message. The Day of the Lord is the day when God unleashes His anger and His wrath on the sinful people of this planet. He starts with Israel for their hard-hearted refusal to follow Him, but His punishment finally encompasses all the inhabitants of this world for their mistreatment of His chosen and their unending perniciousness. It is a time of darkness, distress, fear and anguish. It is a time of torment at the hand of God. It is a time of judgment and punishment.

The New Testament echoes and continues this theme:

Acts 2:19-20, quoting Joel 2:30 -- "AND I WILL GRANT WONDERS IN THE SKY ABOVE AND SIGNS ON THE EARTH BELOW, BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE. THE SUN WILL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME.

John also saw this specific moment in his vision, but he added one critical element to the mix. John not only saw the men of earth running to hide from the wrath of God, but:

Rev. 6:12-17 -- I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth *made* of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

Jesus, the Lamb, takes part in this vengeful wrath. Take note of how complete the list of terrorized people is: kings, great men, commanders, rich men, strong men, every servant, every free man. It's most certainly John's intention to make sure that no one is left out. Absolutely everyone living on earth at this juncture in time falls under the wrath not only of God, but also of Christ Himself. As Christ warned:

Luke 21:34-36 -- "Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

The day of the Lord descends on every inhabitant of the earth - the whole earth.

There is no church hiding somewhere, or no "Christian Nation" which escapes these horrific events. There are no individuals with solar-paneled homes, private gardens, their own milk cows and water wells who will "ride out" this period of unrestrained terror. The only people who are safe during this wrath are the people who no longer populate the earth.

A Thief in the Night

You would think that with all this warning, given all the signs Jesus catalogued, and the several appearances of this theme in Scripture, men and women would see this horrible time coming and avoid it at all costs.

But, not so...“The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches” (Mark 4:19) are tough taskmasters. And, virtually no one sees it approaching. As Jesus described it:

Mat. 24:37-39 -- "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be."

Luke 17:28-30 -- "It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed."

Christ said that His return would have the same element of surprise to those who had not received the witness and the warning. And, He likened that element of surprise to a thief coming in the night.

Mat. 24:42-44 -- "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think *He will*."

There is a warning in that passage: watch and be ready, because while they are busy “getting on with their lives” He will suddenly appear in power and in judgment.

Peter picks it up --

2Pet. 3:10 -- But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be

burned up.

In His warning to the church at Sardis, Christ admonished:

Rev. 3:3 -- "So remember what you have received and heard; and keep *it*, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you."

And later:

Rev.16:15 -- "Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame."

Again, it's either "watch" and be ready to flee to the wilderness or be destroyed.

A quick point of clarification: I've frequently heard preachers attach the phrase "like a thief in the night" to the "rapture." However, as you will clearly notice, there is no such connection in Scripture. The rapture is not the event that appears "like a thief in the night." That phrase is only employed when the Bible's authors are describing the cataclysmic judgment. And, as the next chapter will clarify, the "thief in the night" concept never applies to the Church.

Armageddon

Rev.16:12-16 -- The sixth *angel* poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east. And I saw *coming* out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. ("Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.") And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.

The Day of the Lord, the time of the Great Tribulation, comes to its culmination as the unholy trio sends out demonic messengers to gather the armies of the earth to do battle against God and His Christ. They have always rebelled against Him. But, this is the time appointed and the Great God will avenge Himself.

The church

The final time of Jacob's Trouble includes the wrath of God. But we, the church, are not appointed to wrath.

1Thess 5:9 -- For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

We are at the marriage supper –

Rev. 19:6-10 -- And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright *and* clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God." And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Now, the observant student will notice that these events exactly precede the return of Christ with His saints. (Rev. 19:11 and following). The "Marriage Supper of the Lamb" in which He takes His bride to Himself and clothes her in fine, white linen occurs before Jesus comes back to unleash His wrath and pour out His judgment. The newly adorned saints accompany Him as He returns for that task!

Who are they? They are the church!

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you *as* a pure virgin. (2Cor. 11:2)

The Biblical chronology is consistent and exacting.

What We Know So Far

- A time of trouble is coming to this Earth; trouble such as never was or ever will be again.
- This time is called "the Great Tribulation" and is also known as the time of "Jacob's trouble."

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- But Jacob/Israel will be delivered and protected through it.
 - This time of trouble culminates in the “Day of the Lord,” when God pours out punishment and wrath on the inhabitants of the Earth.
 - Prior to the return of Christ, He will gather His elect saints to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.
 - When Christ returns in vengeance, the saints will accompany Him