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THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH: A DOCTRINE OF THE
EARLY CHURCH OR A RECENT DEVELOPMENT
OF THE DISPENSATIONAL MOVEMENT?

By

DAVID K. HEBERT

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MASTER OF ARTS IN THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL STUDIES

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MISSIONS

ORAL ROBERTS UNIVERSITY

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By

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ABSTRACT

David K. Hebert, Master of Arts in Theological and Historical Studies

The Rapture of the Church: A Doctrine of the Early Church or a Recent Development of the Dispensational Movement?

Larry Hart, Ph.D.

This thesis investigated whether the doctrine of the premillennial, pretribulation Rapture of the Church, as a separate event from Jesus' second coming, originated in the early Church or with the Dispensational Movement around 1830. Although the term "rapture" does not itself appear in Scripture, it comes from the Latin words, *rapere* and *rapiemur* and from the Greek word *harpazo* (which does appear in the New Testament). The New Testament text supports the concept of a Rapture of the Church, as well as being confirmed by the raptures of Enoch, Elijah and Jesus. There are related terms in the New Testament that have been addressed, the foremost being *parousia*. There are also related non-scriptural, theological terms that were defined, the foremost being eschatology, premillennialism, pretribulationism and imminence. The writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers were examined to see if they address any of these terms. Subsequent historical church writings were also reviewed to uncover any mention of the Rapture. All this research was then examined to determine if enough evidence existed to support a conclusion that the Rapture was an orthodox belief of the early Church or not. It was determined that enough evidence exists to support this conclusion.

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CHAPTER 1

THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

The Problem

Since the early nineteenth century, there has arisen a greatly renewed interest in eschatology (from the Greek word *eschatos*, meaning, “the extreme, most remote spoken of place and time, the last,”¹ the study of Last Things, End Times, or final events surrounding the Second Coming or Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ) in general and the Rapture of the Church (as a separate and distinct event from the Second Coming and before the Tribulation) specifically. The Rapture has been popularized in recent years by the *Left Behind* series of Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins.

Many modern day theologians posit that the beginning of the teaching of the Rapture, as a belief within the traditional orthodox Church, did not occur until around the year 1830, coincidental with the rise of Dispensationalism (see “Definition of Terms” below.) Some strong proponents of this position are George Eldon Ladd (in his book, *The Blessed Hope*, 1956), William Everett Bell, Jr. (in his doctoral thesis, “A Critical Evaluation of the Pretribulation Rapture Doctrine in Christian Eschatology,” 1967), and Dave MacPherson (in his books, *The Incredible Cover-up*, 1975, *The Great Rapture Hoax*, 1983, *The Rapture Plot*, 1994, *The Three R’s: Rapture, Revisionism, Robbery: Pretribulation Rapturism from 1830 to Hal Lindsey*, 1998).

¹Spiros Zodhiates, ed., “eschatos,” *The Complete Word Study Dictionary, New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 661-2.

Other theologians maintain that the Rapture was part of the early church's premillennial eschatological teaching of the imminent return of Christ (over-hanging, any moment, nothing holding it back, no signs or prerequisite required).² Some strong proponents of this position are: Jesse Forest Silver (in his book, *The Lord's Return: Seen in History and in Scripture as Pre-millennial and Imminent*, 1914), John F. Walvoord (in his book, *The Rapture Question*, 1957), Tim LaHaye (in his paper, "The Case for the Imminent Rapture of the Church," 2000), and Norman Geisler (in his book, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 4, *The Church and Last Things*, 2005).

Until recently, there has been very little primary source evidence from the early church Fathers to support the claim that they believed in and/or taught about the Rapture. Bell did the most extensive historical and exegetical review of the pretribulation Rapture doctrine to date. He published the findings of his extensive research in the preface to his dissertation and applicable portions are quoted below:

1. No trace of the pretribulation rapture doctrine was found in the writings of the Ante-Nicene fathers.
2. No trace of dispensationalism was found in the writings of the Ante-Nicene fathers, which traces, had they been found, would have indicated at least an embryonic pretribulationism.
3. The Ante-Nicene fathers when they mentioned the subject at all, were specifically posttribulation and non-dispensational.
4. The historical origin of pretribulationism was traced to John Nelson Darby . . . The doctrine apparently arose about 1830. . . .
7. It was found that the primary support for the doctrine stemmed from the distinctive hermeneutical methodology of dispensationalism. A study of key passages of scripture disclosed that the system is not supported by an exegesis of the text. Its basic hermeneutical deficiency was found to lie in its disposition to arrive at premature literal interpretations of Old Testament passages with insufficient attention being given to the applicable New Testament passages . . .

²Tim LaHaye, "The Case for the Imminent Rapture of the Church," December 2000, <http://www.tyndale.edu/dirn/articles/rapture.html/> (18 October 2005).

8. A study of the specific New Testament data concerning the second coming of Christ confirmed the hypothesis that the doctrine was a product of theological deduction rather than inductive exegesis. It was found that the New Testament knows nothing of any future coming of Christ apart from His glorious, posttribulational coming which is so prominent in its pages.

9. It was concluded, then, that the pretribulational rapture position is not to be viewed as part of historic Christian orthodoxy.³

Bell also outlines the criteria for accepting any primary source evidence on the Rapture by the Church Fathers below:

Any of the following items would be of crucial importance, if found, whether by direct statement or clear inference:

- (1) Any mention that Christ's second coming was to consist of more than one phase, separated by an interval of years.
- (2) Any mention that Christ was to remove the church from the earth before the tribulation period.
- (3) Any reference to the resurrection of the just as being in two stages.
- (4) Any indication that Israel and the church were to be clearly distinguished, thus providing some rationale for a removal of Christians before God "again deals with Israel."⁴

This then is the problem to be addressed by this thesis: Is there enough primary source, historical evidence to support whether the Rapture was an orthodox doctrine of the Early Church, passed down from the Apostles?

Background

Those who hold to the early nineteenth century theory maintain that since there are no primary source references to the Rapture of the Church in any of the Patristic Writings, or throughout the entire Middle Ages for that matter, then the Rapture of the

³William Everett Bell, Jr., "A Critical Evaluation of the Pretribulation Rapture Doctrine in Christian Eschatology" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, School of Education, 1967), ii-iii.

⁴Bell, 26-27.

Church is only a recent development from the outer edge of orthodoxy of the Church; which came into prominence during the rise of Dispensationalism (see “Definition of Terms”) around the year 1830. Those who promoted this belief in the Rapture at that time were Edward Irving, a Scottish minister who translated the Jesuit Manuel de Lacunza’s, *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty* (under the pseudonym Juan Josafat Ben Ezra) from Spanish into English in 1826; Margaret MacDonald, a young Scottish girl who saw a vision of the Rapture in Scotland in 1830; and John Nelson Darby, an Anglican priest from Ireland, who espoused it as a doctrine and with the help of Benjamin Wills Newton formed a new denomination called the Plymouth Brethren in the 1830’s.⁵ The modern theologians, who hold to this theory, acknowledge the fact that throughout Church History the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus was taught as an orthodox doctrine of the Church. Even most of them admit that the Church Fathers were premillennialists (believing in a literal interpretation of the Book of Revelation,⁶ with its view of a Tribulation, an Antichrist, and Jesus establishing an earthly kingdom for a thousand years, Millennium, from the Latin words *milus*, meaning thousand and *annum*, meaning years, after His Second Coming).⁷ Other names for premillennialists are

⁵Dave MacPherson, *The Incredible Cover-Up* (Medford, OR: Omega Publications, 1975), 27-32, 37-8, 46-60.

⁶Unless otherwise indicated all Bible references in the paper are to the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

⁷Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), 46.

millenarians and chiliasts (taken from the Greek word for thousand).⁸ However, these theologians do not believe that a distinctly separate appearing of the Lord Jesus to take the Church to heaven with Himself (the Rapture) was ever taught by the Church prior to the 1830 timeframe.

The other side of this theological debate bases their theory upon the Early Church's premillennial view of eschatology and the teaching of the imminent return of the Lord Jesus. Although, until recently they have only found a very few isolated specific inferences to the Rapture in the Patristic Writings that may satisfy any of Bell's four criteria mentioned above. The discussion of Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, or Amillennialism, as the orthodox view of the Early Church, also applies to the question at hand. If one takes either the postmillennial (Christ will return to earth after the Millennium, not necessarily a literal thousand years, and after the Church has brought in the Kingdom of God by the fulfillment of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20) or amillennial (the belief that between Jesus' two Comings or Advents, He rules in the hearts of His Believers in a Spiritual Kingdom, which is definitely not a literal thousand year period) stance, the Rapture of the Church does not fit into their eschatology. That is because there will be no literal Tribulation and the Church will ultimately be triumphant on earth and usher in the Second Coming of Christ. However, if the premillennial stance is taken, then the Rapture of the Church becomes an issue. Premillennialism can be further subdivided into two groups: Historicism, belief that the prophecies concerning the End Times provide a symbolic history of the Church Period leading up to the Second

⁸R. A. Torrey, *The Return of the Lord Jesus* (Los Angeles: Grant's Publishing House, 1913), 145.

Coming, which examines past and present Church History to seek fulfillment of specific prophecies; and Futurism, belief that none of the End Time prophecies will be fulfilled until a future short period of time, just before the Second Coming. Additionally, one must address the Rapture of the Church in terms of when it occurs: pre-Tribulation, mid-Tribulation, or post-Tribulation (in conjunction with the Second Coming).⁹ The majority of those who teach the Rapture of the Church place it before the revealing of the Antichrist and the start of the Tribulation (pretribulation). However, there are others who teach a midtribulation (halfway through the Tribulation and before the Great Tribulation), pre-Wrath (after the mid-point of the Tribulation and before God pours out His wrath on the Earth, The Day of the Lord; which takes place after the Sixth and before the Seventh Seal in Rev 6 and 7), or posttribulation (after the Tribulation and in conjunction with the Second Coming) Rapture also.¹⁰

The author of this paper has maintained an avid interest in eschatology and spent countless hours of personal bible study and research endeavoring to uncover the truth of this mystery of the Rapture ever since coming to know the Lord Jesus and being filled with the Holy Spirit in the mid 1970's. In preparing the research for this thesis, a search was conducted to see if any other masters or doctoral work had been previously done on this topic. In addition to Bell's dissertation, mentioned above, three related works were found. Bell concludes his dissertation by saying, ". . . on the basis of the foregoing study, that the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture is not supported by the exegesis of scripture

⁹Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming, American Premillennialism 1875-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 9-11.

¹⁰Rosenthal, 60-61.

or the testimony of church history. It has been demonstrated that the doctrine was entirely unknown in the early church, the standard belief being that Christ's coming would be posttribulational."¹¹ The other three works are cited and summarized below.

John Rea's masters thesis concludes with the following:

In the rapture only the true Church will be translated to heaven . . . can truly be said to be in Christ . . . The resurrection of the dead in Christ will take place at a different time from the resurrection of the Old Testament saints and of the martyred tribulation saints . . . The need for the deliverance or rescue of the Church from the hour of trial which shall come upon all the world . . . only the pre-tribulation system of interpretation seems to allow for sufficient time to conduct . . . the judgement of the believers' works at the bema-seat of Christ and the marriage and wedding supper of the Lamb . . . For all these reasons it is logical to conclude that the rapture of the Church—the return of our blessed Saviour for His own—will precede the tribulation.¹²

Allan Carlsson's masters' thesis broke down the historical witness into periods:

Apostolic Fathers, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, the Middle Ages, the Reformation and post-Reformation period, and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To this, he added two appendices: Imminency and Pretribulationism and Jewish Tradition and Pretribulationism. Under the summary of the Apostolic Fathers he states, "In the sources consulted no mention was found of the Rapture as a distinct event. However, all of the writers were looking forward to the soon return of the Lord."¹³ In addressing the Ante-Nicene Fathers, he makes the following statement, "The most interesting quotation from Irenaeus is the following which contains the earliest mention

¹¹Bell, 353.

¹²John Rea, "The Rapture of the Church and Its Chronological Relation to The Great Tribulation" (M.Th. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1954), 128-130.

¹³Allan Carlsson, "A Historical Approach to the Doctrine of the Rapture" (M.Th. thesis, Wheaton College, 1956), 13.

of the Rapture as a distinct event found in the course of this study. The Church seems to be pictured as caught up during tribulation.”¹⁴ In summary of the Ante-Nicene Fathers, he goes on to say that there was little reference to the Rapture, the prevailing understanding was the Church would go through the tribulation and the premillennial tide turned to amillennialism with the teachings of Origen, Eusebius, and Augustine.¹⁵ In the summary of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers he amplifies:

With the conversion of Constantine and the resultant change of attitude of the Roman Empire toward the church, the church increasingly came to believe that her present temporal position was the actual fulfillment of the promised kingdom of God. The City of God advocated the idea that this kingdom was established at the first advent of Christ . . . In this period the first instance of an individual statement on the time of the Rapture in relationship to other eschatological events occurs in Chrysostom. Christ’s coming with his saints and the Rapture of the saints on earth to meet Christ happen at the same time. The other representatives chosen for this period see a time in the future when the Antichrist will be persecuting the Church. This does not seem to allow for a Rapture of the saints prior to the tribulation period.¹⁶

In the summary of the Middle Ages, he states, “The long period of time from 500-1500 has been treated as one period of time since there was little development of thought in regard to the Rapture.”¹⁷ Then, in his overall summary he concludes, “This study indicates that up to the nineteenth century, the consensus of opinion expressed in the various historical divisions made in this study . . . is that which is today known as the post-tribulation Rapture theory or historical premillennialism. Throughout these periods little

¹⁴Carlsson, 15.

¹⁵Carlsson, 21-22.

¹⁶Carlsson, 30-1.

¹⁷Carlsson, 43.

direct mention is made to the Rapture, but tribulation and Antichrist are seen before the coming of Christ, which of course necessitates a post-tribulation Rapture.”¹⁸ In appendix A, he adds, “The pre-tribulation Rapture cannot be defended from the early fathers by a defense of the doctrine of imminency of the Lord’s return.”¹⁹ However, appendix B ends on this note, “This material gives evidence that there is some connection between a Jewish tradition and the pre-tribulation Rapture position.”²⁰ In total, there were several references to the Rapture, but very little evidence for a pretribulation Rapture.

Charles August Hauser, Jr.’s doctoral dissertation, treats the Patristic Fathers in three separate periods (96-150, 150-200, and 200-250), each addressing five different eschatological issues: the Great Tribulation, the Antichrist, the Second Advent, the Resurrection, and the Kingdom (notice, there is no separate category for the Rapture). Hauser reviewed the following writers for evidence of their eschatological views on the five issues by period. Period 1 includes: Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Ignatius, Papias, Aristides, *Epistle to Diognetus*, *The Didache*, *An Ancient Homily*, *Epistle of Barnabas*, and *Shepherd of Hermas*. Period 2 includes: Justin Martyr, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus of Antioch, Irenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria. Period 3 includes: Hippolytus, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen. Even though it was not a primary focus of his research, the assessment of the collective view of a pretribulation Rapture was the following:

¹⁸Carlsson, 93b.

¹⁹Carlsson, 99.

²⁰Carlsson, 101.

The Church Fathers believed that the Church would be on earth during the tribulation period. This is seen in the earliest writers and there is nothing in the other writers to contradict this. They speak of the persecution of the Church by the Antichrist and of the Church being on earth at the second advent of Christ. Two writers mention the translation of the Church but one, Irenaeus, does not tell when it will take place and the other, Origen, places it at the second advent of Christ. They did not seem to realize that part of the blessed hope of the Church was the escape from the wrath to come. The passages where the Apostles Paul and John teach this truth are neglected by these writers. Perhaps the extreme persecution which the Christians received during the first three centuries conditioned them to believe that they would go through the tribulation.²¹

Again, there are two isolated references to the Rapture, but just as passing comments that relate to the other eschatological findings. Despite Hauser's general pretribulation disposition, the Rapture was just not a primary focus of his research.

Although the three works above, which dealt with the Fathers' view on the Rapture, contain several isolated references to the Rapture, in total, they contain very little evidence to support the idea that the Fathers taught or believed in a Pretribulation Rapture of the Church. If anything, they could only be generally characterized as posttribulation premillennialists, and if they believed in the Rapture at all, it was in conjunction with the Second Coming of Jesus and not a separate event. Therefore, it remains the primary purpose of this thesis to thoroughly research the Early Church Writings to see if there is more evidence to support the theory that they did possibly believe in and teach a Pretribulation Rapture of the Church. Then, to continue with that same type of research into the Medieval Church Period; to see if there remains at least a strain of teaching on the Rapture of the Church through that period also.

²¹Charles August Hauser, Jr., "The Eschatology of the Early Church Fathers" (Th.D. diss., Grace Theological Seminary, 1961), 234.

Presuppositions

The author believes in a plenary view of Scripture, with a historical-grammatical-literal hermeneutic and a premillennial-futurist perspective of eschatology. Several scriptures, written primarily by Paul, support the Rapture (1 Cor 15:51-53; 2 Cor 12:2-4; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:9-11, 23; 2 Thess 2:1-3). These scriptures are confirmed by Luke (Luke 21:35-36; Acts 1:1-11; 8:39-40), the writer of Hebrews in chapter 11, verse 5, James (Jas 5:7-8), Peter (2 Pet 3:4-18), and John (John 14:3; 1 John 2:28; 3:2-3; Rev 3:10; 4:1-2; 7:9-17; 12:1-5), and are supported by Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:2-11), in the New Testament, and by Enoch's translation (Gen 5:24), Elijah being taken up in the whirlwind (2 Kgs 2:1-11), and the mention of God delivering Daniel's people at the time of the distress (Dan 12:1-2), in the Old Testament. Therefore, it makes sense that if the concept of the Rapture was definitely addressed by at least the Apostles Paul, John, Peter, and James; then, it would have been passed on to their disciples, the Apostolic Fathers, and subsequently to their disciples and mentioned in their writings (since they were the closest to the original Apostles in both time and teaching).

Another presupposition of the author is that the Patristic Fathers, up to and including the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea in 325, were almost exclusively premillennialists in their view of eschatology. Their premillennial perspective did not begin to change until the time of Origen in the late third century and did not fully change

until Augustine's amillennial doctrine became the orthodox view of the Church in the early fifth century.²²

Methodology

The author will first define all the terms related to "Rapture" in both the Old and New Testaments to lay the foundation for the entire study (see "Definition of Terms"). Next, the author will exegete the traditional "Rapture passages," along with any related passages. Then, the author will review the relevant writings of the Patristic Fathers to determine: (1) if they made any explicit or implicit references to a possible Rapture of the Church (including references in the original language written); (2) if they differentiated between the two Greek terms *parousia* and *erchomenon* (see "Definition of Terms"), when referring to the Rapture versus the Second Coming; and (3) if they taught about the imminent return of Christ for His Church and/or to judge the world. Next, the author will search for any references to the Rapture by any Post-Nicene Fathers and any other credible Church writer up to the year 1750. Finally, a study will be made of modern day theologians' writings on the subject to see if they have uncovered any early writings or research to answer the question of when the belief of the Rapture was first taught as an orthodox doctrine by the Church. All of this research will then be compared to the modern theologians who purport that the Rapture was just a recent belief started by a fringe group of the Church around 1830. The author will then conclude with a proposal as to whether enough evidence exists to determine that the concept of the Rapture was

²²Paul L. King, "Premillennialism and the Early Church," in *Essays on Premillennialism*, eds. K. Neil Foster and David E. Fessenden (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications Inc., 2002), 1, 8-10.

taught as a natural progression of the Apostles' teaching on the subject in the Early Church Period.

Definition of Terms

Rapture

A few key terms related to this topic and body of research need to be defined as a preliminary understanding of the Rapture of the Church. The first term and central theme of this research is “rapture” itself. Rapture does not appear in the text of the Bible; however, it comes from the Latin word *rapere*, meaning “rapid”²³ and the Latin word *rapiemur*, meaning, “we shall be caught up.”²⁴ This word was taken from the Greek verb *harpazo*, meaning, “to seize upon, spoil, snatch away or take to oneself,” especially used of rapture (Acts 8:39; 2 Cor 12:2, 4; 1 Thess 4:17; Rev 12:5). *Harpazo* is translated “caught up” or “caught away” the five times (out of thirteen) it appears in the Bible relating to rapture. The other eight times it is translated, “to forcibly seize upon, snatch away, take to oneself or use force on someone.”²⁵ In Acts 8:39, the Holy Spirit “caught away” Philip after he ministered to the Ethiopian eunuch and placed him in Azotus, some twenty-thirty miles away. In 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, Paul twice describes his experience of being “caught up” to the Third Heaven. In Revelation 12:5, the man child of the Woman (usually interpreted to mean, Jesus) was “caught up” to God and His throne. And in 1

²³Rosenthal, 53.

²⁴George Eldon Ladd, *The Last Things, An Eschatology for Laymen* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 84.

²⁵Zodhiates, “harpazo,” *Dictionary*, 257.

Thessalonians 4:17, the primary text for the Rapture of the Church, “we who are alive and remain shall be *caught up* together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air . . .” (together with them refers to the “dead in Christ,” who were resurrected immediately preceding the Rapture). New Testament Greek words that are similar to *harpazo* and are used in related passages are addressed next.

The noun, *episunagoge*, means, “to gather together, the act of gathering together or assembling together.” This word is only used twice in the New Testament: once in Hebrews 10:25, referring to “not forsaking the *gathering together* of Believers;” and once in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, referring to the “gathering together” of believers to meet Jesus at his coming (the Rapture, previously addressed in 1 Thess 4:17).²⁶

The verb, *analambano*, means, “to take up” and is derived from *analepsis*, meaning, “ascension, taking up.” This is the word used in Mark 16:19 and Acts 1:2, 11, 22 to describe Jesus’ ascension (which may also be termed a rapture).²⁷ The same word is used in the Septuagint in 2 Kings 2:9-11 to describe Elijah’s being taken to heaven by a chariot of fire in a whirlwind²⁸ (another reference to a rapture). It is used once again in the Septuagint to describe Ezekiel being “bodily lifted up” by the Spirit of God for his visions.²⁹ Two other words, related to *analambano*, are used by Luke in Acts 1 to refer to

²⁶Zodhiates, “episunagoge,” *Dictionary*, 640.

²⁷Zodhiates, “analambano,” *Dictionary*, 153.

²⁸J. Lust, E. Eynikel, and K. Hauspie, “analambano,” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, part 1 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1992), 29.

²⁹George Morrish, “analambano,” *A Concordance of the Septuagint*, (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, Ltd., n.d.; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 16.

the ascension of Jesus. In verse 9, the verb, *epairo*, meaning, “to be taken up, borne upward” is used.³⁰ In verse 10, the verb, *poreuomai*, meaning, “went up” is used.³¹ A related verb, *anabaino*, meaning “to ascend into heaven either to have communion with God or to dwell there,”³² is used in Revelation 4:1 when John is told to “*come up* [emphasis added] here” by Jesus.

The verb, *metatithemi*, means, “To transpose, put in another place and hence to transfer, translate.” This word is used in both Hebrews 11:5³³ and in Genesis 5:24, in the Septuagint,³⁴ to describe the *translation* of Enoch to heaven (another Old Testament rapture). This word is related to the verb *allasso*, meaning, “To change the form or nature of a thing,” which is used in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 to describe what happens to the believer’s body at the Rapture.³⁵ And this word is related to the verb, *metamorphoo*, meaning “to transform, transfigure, or change one’s form,” which is used to describe Jesus’ appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-9; Luke 9:28-

³⁰Zodhiates, “epairo,” *Dictionary*, 611.

³¹Spiros Zodhiates, ed., “poreuomai,” *The Complete Word Study New Testament: KJV* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 391.

³²Zodhiates, “anabaino,” *Dictionary*, 142.

³³Zodhiates, “metatithemi,” *Dictionary*, 973.

³⁴J. Lust, E. Eynikel, and K. Hauspie, “metatithemi,” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, part 2 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1996), 301.

³⁵Zodhiates, “allasso,” *Dictionary*, 124.

36). According to Spiros Zodhiates, “This suggests what the bodies of the righteous may be as a result of the resurrection of our bodies (1 Cor 15:51f.)”³⁶

The verb, *ekpheugo*, means, “to flee from, escape calamities.” It is used in Luke 21:36 to describe the believers being able to “escape” the “great distress upon the land, and wrath to this people” previously described and to stand before Jesus (another reference to the Rapture). It is also used in Romans 2:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:3, and Hebrews 2:3; 12:25 in reference to “escaping” the judgment of God.³⁷ The verb, *sozo*, means, “to save, deliver, make whole or preserve from danger, loss, destruction.” It is used in Romans 5:9 to describe believers being “saved from” the wrath of God,³⁸ and in the Septuagint to describe the following: the “rescue” of Lot and his family in Genesis 19:17-22; Jacob’s “surviving” the encounter with the angel in Genesis 32:30; and in Daniel 12:1 to describe Daniel’s people being “saved from” the “time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time,” if their name is “found written in the book.”³⁹ The noun form of *sozo*—*soteria*—means, “safety, deliverance or preservation from danger or destruction.” It is used in Hebrews 11:7 to describe Noah and his family’s “deliverance” from the Flood and in Exodus 14:13; 15:2, in the Septuagint, to describe the “deliverance” of Israel from Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea, and in 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 1:14; 9:28; and 1 Peter

³⁶Zodhiates, “metamorphoo,” *Dictionary*, 968-9.

³⁷Zodhiates, “ekpheugo,” *Dictionary*, 558.

³⁸Zodhiates, “sozo,” *Dictionary*, 1353.

³⁹Morrish, “sozo,” 235.

1:5; 2 Peter 3:15 to describe believers being saved from the wrath of God.⁴⁰ The reference to the “deliverance” of Noah and his family in the Septuagint uses the preposition, *dia*, with “water” in the accusative case (translated, because of the water), and with “flood” in the genitive case (translated, through the flood). Therefore, the total translation in the Septuagint is, “because of the water of the flood.”⁴¹ This same verse in the Hebrew Bible is translated, “*escaped* [emphasis added] the waters of the flood.”⁴² All of this bears witness to the use of the concept of rapture in the Old Testament. And as the Old Testament Law states in Deuteronomy 19:15, “on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.”

Apostasy

The next term has two completely separate meanings and remains very controversial in its translation. The noun is *apostasia*, transliterated “apostasy” in English and means, “a departure, apostasy.” It is the feminine of *apostasion*, which means, “a departure, divorce or dismissal of a woman from her husband, the deed or instrument of such divorce,” and is a derivative of the verb, *aphistemi*, meaning, “to depart or stand away from.” *Apostasia* is only used twice in the New Testament: Acts 21:21, speaking of “forsaking” Moses and the Law and in the verse in question; 2 Thessalonians 2:3, which

⁴⁰Zodhiates, “soteria,” *Dictionary*, 1360.

⁴¹Lancelot C. L. Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, Ltd., 1851; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 8.

⁴²John R. Kohlenberger III, *The Interlinear NIV Hebrew-English Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 15.

is translated in modern Bibles as “Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the *apostasy* [emphasis added] comes first.”⁴³ Apostasy is understood to mean falling away from the truth or “religious apostasy” and “should not be used as evidence for the pretribulational Rapture.” This is the conclusion of William W. Combs of Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary⁴⁴ and Paul D. Feinberg, in his article for the Pre-Trib Research Center.⁴⁵ However, the first English translations of the Bible (1384 Wycliffe Bible, 1526 Tyndale Bible, 1535 Coverdale Bible, 1539 Cranmer Bible, 1576 Breeches Bible, 1583 Beza Bible and 1608 Geneva Bible), all translate *apostasia* in this verse as “departing first.”⁴⁶ Dr. Roy Hicks in his book, *Another Look at the Rapture*, adds the following Greek scholars and translators to that list: Kenneth S. Wuest, in his *The New Testament – An Expanded Translation*; John Dawson, A.B.; John Lineberry, B.A.; John James, L.L.D. (1825); Rev. J. R. Major, M.A. (1831); John Parkhurst, Lexicon – London (1851); Robert Scott (1811-1887), Oxford Press; and *The Amplified Bible, New Testament footnote*.⁴⁷ The “it [emphasis added] will not come unless” speaks of the “day of the Lord” in verse 2. Prior to that in verse 1, Paul is speaking about “the coming of our

⁴³Zodhiates, “apostasia,” *Dictionary*, 236.

⁴⁴William W. Combs, “Is *Apostasia* in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 a Reference to the Rapture?,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 3 (Fall 1998): 87.

⁴⁵Paul D. Feinberg, “2 Thessalonians 2 and the Rapture,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 309-311.

⁴⁶H Wayne House, “Apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3: Apostasy or Rapture?,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 270.

⁴⁷Roy Hicks, *Another Look at the Rapture* (Tulsa: Harrison House, 1982), 47-49.

Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him,” which describes the Rapture previously addressed in 1 Thessalonians 4. Therefore, contextually it appears to make sense to translate *apostasia* as “departure” (Rapture) versus “apostasy” or “falling away.”

Resurrection

The next term to be defined and placed in juxtaposition to rapture is resurrection (mostly the verb, *egeiro*, meaning “to rise, have risen” and the noun, *anastasis*, meaning “a standing up, a resurrection or recovery.”)⁴⁸ Resurrection speaks about the same type of raising or taking up as *harpazo*, but in reference to the dead or “sleeping” versus the living. In other words, raising the dead bodily back to life in a new incorruptible, immortal body compared to transporting or translating the living bodily to heaven. Jesus is the first example of this resurrection. Then, there will be those who are his (asleep/dead in Christ) at his “coming” immediately preceding the Rapture (1 Cor 15:20-23, 50-52 and 1 Thess 4:16-17). Therefore, rapture and resurrection are very closely related, yet still completely separate and distinct concepts. And, Jesus’ resurrection and ascension (rapture) at the beginning of the Church Age, is the type, model, or precedent for the resurrection and Rapture of His Body (the Church) at the end of the Church Age.

Second Coming

A term closely related to the Rapture (and in many theologians’ minds inclusive with it) is the Second Coming of Christ. In New Testament Greek, the word “coming” is mainly represented by two words *parousia* and *erchomai*. *Parousia* means:

⁴⁸Zodhiates, “egeiro” and “anastasis,” *Dictionary*, 496 and 159.

Present, presence, a being present, a coming to a place. Presence, coming or arrival. A technical term used of the coming of Christ (Matt 24:3; 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 2 Thess 2:8; 2 Pet 3:4; 1 John 2:28); the Son of Man (Matt 24:27, 37, 39); the Lord (1 Thess 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1; James 5:7-8; 2 Pet 1:16); the day of God (2 Pet 3:12). The term *parousia* refers to the Second Coming of the Lord, but the Second Coming is not just one event taking place at a particular time. Rather it is made up of a series of events. We can understand which event is referred to only by a careful examination of the context in which the terms *parousia* or *erchomai* (to come) occur . . .

The coming of the Lord at the end of the seven-year tribulation period is what the Lord describes in Matt 24:15-22, 32-34; Mark 13:14-23, 29-30 (cf. Luke 19:41-44; 21:20-23, 32-33; 23:28-30). The judgement of the Lord is designated as a specific coming by the verb *elthe*, the aor. subjunctive of *erchomai* indicating that this specific coming is prior to the final judgement of the world. This coming is also called *apokalupsis*, revelation (Rom 2:5; 8:19; 1 Cor 1:7; 1 Pet 1:7, 13; 4:13) and *epiphaneia*, manifestation (2 Thess 2:8; 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 1:10; 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13). This is going to be the Last Day and will bring about the termination of the existing order of things.

Thus the coming of the Lord, or His *parousia*, consists of several comings which are in reality stages of a continuous process [emphasis added].⁴⁹

Erchomai means:

to come, to go, move or pass along, intrans. in any direction, as marked by the adjuncts or often simply by the context. The forms from *elthon*, the 2d aor., however, more frequently signify “to come” . . .

in a fut. sense, apparently, but only of what is certain to take place (John 4:25; 14:3, 30; Rev 1:7) . . . the One who was (or had been) and the coming One (Rev 1:4, 8; 4:8) . . . *epi*, upon, with the gen. of thing, implying rest upon (Matt 24:30, “upon the clouds” [a.t.]) In the sense of to come again, back, to return, . . .

Two of its many derivatives; *eleusis*, advent, coming; *katerchomai*, to come down;⁵⁰

Erchomenon, the noun form of *erchomai*, is also translated “coming or arrival.”⁵¹ Two of the three other Greek words used in the New Testament in association with the Second

⁴⁹Zodhiates, “parousia,” *Dictionary*, 1123-4.

⁵⁰Zodhiates, “erchomai,” *Dictionary*, 656-8.

⁵¹*The Online Greek Bible*, “erchomenon,” 2004, <http://greekbible.com> (31 October 2005).

Coming were mentioned above in the definition of *parousia*: *epiphaneia* and *apokalupsis*.

The third is *phaneroo*, meaning, “to make apparent, manifest, known, show openly.”⁵²

Epiphaneia means, “An appearing, appearance speaking of both the first Advent of the Lord and the second and future appearance of the Lord.”⁵³ *Apokalupsis* means:

Revelation, uncovering, unveiling, disclosure. One of three words referring to the Second Coming of Christ . . . The other two words are *epiphaneia*, appearing . . . and *parousia*, coming, presence . . . Apokalupsis, a grander and more comprehensive word, includes not merely the thing shown and seen but the interpretation, the unveiling of the same. The *epiphaneiai* (pl.), appearances, are contained in the apokalupsis, revelation, being separate points or moments therein. Christ’s first coming was an *epiphaneia* (2 Tim 1:10); the second, an *apokalupsis*, will be far more glorious.⁵⁴

Related Terms

Terms related to Rapture, Resurrection, and the Second Coming that must also be addressed include: the Day of the Lord, wrath of God, and the Tribulation. The Day of the Lord is an Old Testament term, which becomes contextualized by the eschatological writings in the New Testament. It is mentioned by the Prophets: Obadiah (Obad 15); Joel (Joel 1:15; 2:1-2, 10-11, 30-31; 3:14-16); Amos (Amos 5:18-20); Isaiah (Isa 2:12-21; 13:6-13); Ezekiel (Ezek 13:3-8; 30:2-3); Zephaniah (Zeph 1:14 – 2:3); and Zechariah (Zech 14:1-4). In all these scriptures, the Day of the Lord is characterized as a time of thick darkness, gloominess, trouble, distress, terror and God pouring out His destruction, “wrath” and fierce anger, punishment, indignation and fury, vengeance and fire upon the

⁵²Zodhiates, “phaneroo,” *Dictionary*, 1435.

⁵³Zodhiates, “epiphaneia,” *Dictionary*, 644.

⁵⁴Zodhiates, “apokalupsis,” *Dictionary*, 225.

world for its evil, sin and iniquity at some time in the future.⁵⁵ Therefore, the “Day of the Lord” is when the “wrath of God” will be poured out upon the Earth because of sins. The clear New Testament references to the Day of the Lord (Acts 2:19-20; 1 Thess 5:2-4; 2 Thess 2:1-2; and 2 Pet 3:9-10), place it within the context of Daniel’s 70th Week (from Dan 9:24-27; sixty-nine of the seventy weeks of years, or 483 out of 490 years, were fulfilled upon Jesus the Messiah’s death and resurrection in AD 29 or 30). This remaining 70th Week is also commonly referred to as the seven year Tribulation period addressed in the Book of Revelation and by Daniel 12; Matthew 24; Mark 13; and Luke 21. This seven year period is also commonly broken into two 3 ½ year periods (Dan 9:27, “but in the middle of the week”), with the latter 3 ½ year period being known as the Great Tribulation. As previously alluded to in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9, God will “deliver” (*sozo*) believers from this wrath to come and “did not appoint” believers unto this wrath, but “salvation” (*soteria*) through Jesus Christ. Therefore, believers will not be on earth during the Day of the Lord/Tribulation; when God pours out his wrath upon the world, but in Heaven with Jesus⁵⁶ (another reference to the Rapture of the Church).

The theological terms related to the Rapture are: eschatology, imminency, dispensationalism, premillennialism, historic premillennialism (historicism), futuristic premillennialism (futurism), pretribulationism, midtribulationism, posttribulationism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism. Both eschatology and

⁵⁵Rosenthal, 118-124.

⁵⁶J. Randall Price, “Old Testament Tribulation Terms,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 82-3.

imminency were defined in the “Problem” section. Premillennialism, historicism, futurism, pretribulationism, midtribulationism, posttribulationism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism, were all defined in the “Background” section.

Dispensationalism is a theological belief attributed to John Nelson Darby that teaches that God deals with humanity throughout Biblical History in a number of (usually seven) periods of time, economies, administrations, or dispensations (for example, Innocence, Conscience, Government, Patriarchal Rule, Mosaic Law, Grace or the Church Age, and the Millennial Kingdom). Dispensationalists hold to the following four major doctrines: (1) A distinct separation between an earthly Israel and the heavenly Church; (2) A clear separation between Law and Grace; (3) The New Testament Church is a “parenthesis” in God’s plan and was not foretold in the Old Testament; and (4) A clear distinction between the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming of Christ, separated by the seven year Tribulation. All of their beliefs are based on a literal, plenary interpretation of the Bible.⁵⁷ Based on the problem addressed above and the terms which have just been defined, an exegetical study will be done in the next chapter of the primary and related passages normally attributed to the Rapture of the Church.

⁵⁷Walter A. Elwell, ed., “dispensation, dispensationalism,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 343-5.

CHAPTER 2

AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF RAPTURE PASSAGES

Introduction and Background

Based on the problem addressed and the terms defined in chapter 1, an exegetical study follows of the primary passages normally attributed to the Rapture of the Church: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-54. Additionally, other passages that relate to these primary passages will be incorporated into the study. Before the exegesis, however, a brief foundational study of the concept of biblical time will be made.

The concept of time was created for humanity by God (Gen 1:14-19). However, God is love, spirit and light (1 John 4:8, 16; John 4:23-24; 1 John 1:5) and exists in/at the speed of light; where, according to Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity, there is no time (just eternity, infinity—Ps 90:2). Therefore, the purpose of time rests within God's creation (Eccl 8:5-6; Prov 16:4). Time had a beginning (Gen 1:14), is linear (proceeding since its creation in a line, not a circle—Luke 2:4; 3:23-38; 17:22-30; 21:7-28; Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:1-11), is finite, quantifiable and measurable (Gen 1:14; 8:22; Gal 4:10), is part of the space-time continuum (Dan 2:20-22, 28-45; 9:1-2, 24-27; 12:8-13; 2 Cor 12:1-4; Rev 1:9-19; 4:1-2), and will cease as one knows it when its purpose is completed (Gen 8:22; Rev 21:1-6a). This concept of time is communicated in Hebrew primarily by the word, *et*,¹ which can mean linear time, but more often is associated with specific

¹Willem A. Van Gemeren, ed., "et," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 564-6.

events and is translated *kairos* in Greek. The word *yom* is also used in Hebrew to communicate a unit of time, most often day or today.² In Greek, the concept of linear or chronological time is communicated primarily by the word, *chronos*—from which is derived the word “chronology,” the study of time. This concept of time is perceived quantitatively as measured by successive objects, events, or moments.³ However, when God steps into time (or eternity coincides with time as one knows it), it is known as *kairos* time, meaning, “season, opportune time or time of accomplishment.” This concept of time is perceived qualitatively and is affected by influence, prevalence, or period of accomplishment. The plural form of *kairos* is translated seasons and means times at which certain foreordained events take place.⁴

The primary example of *kairos* time is the Incarnation (spoken of as being in “the fullness of time” by Gal 4:4). Some examples of *kairos* time from the Old Testament are the following: God walking with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the Fall (Gen 1:27 – 3:24, a coexistent relationship between *chronos* and *kairos* as God originally designed, which separated after the Fall); Enoch’s Rapture to heaven (Gen 5:21-24); Noah’s covenant with God (Gen 8:20 – 9:17); God confusing the people at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9); Job’s conversations with God (Job 38 – 42:9); Abraham’s covenant with God (Gen 15, 17), three visitors (Gen 18), and the sacrificing of Isaac (Gen 22:1-18); Jacob wrestling with the Angel and being renamed Israel (Gen 32:24-32); Moses

²Willem A. Van Gemeren, ed., “yom,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 419-23.

³Zodhiates, “chronos,” *Dictionary*, 1487.

⁴Zodhiates, “kairos,” *Dictionary*, 805.

talking with God in the burning bush (Exod 3 – 4:16), during the Exodus (Exod 5 – 15), atop Mt. Sinai (Exod 19 – 31), and in the pillar of cloud and fire (Exod 40:34-38); Joshua talking with the Captain of the Lord’s Army (Josh 5:13-15); Elijah’s rapture to heaven (2 Kgs 2:1-13); and the visions of Ezekiel and Daniel. More examples from the New Testament are: Jesus’ baptism, the transfiguration, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension and in the future—the Day of the Lord, the Second Coming, and the Millennium. The Garden of Eden, Jesus’ life on Earth, and the Millennium all show God’s intent for *kairos* time and *chronos* time to coexist.

Biblical time is centered on the purposes of God in relation to humanity and is communicated through the concepts of “Salvation History” and the “Kingdom of Heaven (God).”⁵ In Hebrew, kingdom of heaven, is rendered, *malkut samayim*,⁶ and in Greek, *basileia ton ouranon*.⁷ The kingdom of heaven is viewed as the spirit realm, the supernatural where God is and rules sovereignly. Jesus spent much of His time on earth teaching about the kingdom of heaven and that the kingdom came in and through Him.⁸ In the Old Testament, time is viewed as prophetic and looking forward to the kingdom of heaven being restored by the coming of the Messiah (kingdom coming). In the New

⁵Howard M. Ervin, *Conversion-Initiation and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Critique of James D. G. Dunn*, Baptism in the Holy Spirit (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984), 2-3.

⁶Van Gemeren, vol. 2, “malkut,” 956-63; and Willem A. Van Gemeren, ed., “samayim,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 160-6.

⁷Zodhiates, “basileia,” *Dictionary*, 325.

⁸Brad H. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 146, 199-202, 207-8, 220-1.

Testament, time is viewed as apocalyptic (kingdom initiated by Jesus, but not fully realized until his Second Coming). Apocalyptic time is previewed by Jesus' Apocalyptic Discourse on the Mount of Olives (Matt 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). However, apocalyptic time did not actually begin until after the completion of the atonement by the resurrection of Jesus (prophetic fulfillment of the Old Testament Messiah and beginning of the kingdom by Jesus). Apocalyptic time also looks forward to the Second Coming of Jesus and the complete fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven on earth by the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ.⁹ Therefore, it follows that when exegeting eschatological portions of Scripture, one must determine whether the context is prophetic eschatology or apocalyptic eschatology. The Gospels are set in prophetic eschatological time; whereas, the rest of the New Testament is set in apocalyptic eschatological time.¹⁰

Both of the primary Rapture passages were written by Paul in the setting and context of apocalyptic time. The first text was written as part of an epistle to the church at Thessalonica (in modern day Greece) between the years AD 50-52, to encourage the new believers in their faith despite the persecution they were facing. The two epistles to the Thessalonians contain more references to eschatology than any other of Paul's epistles. The second epistle was written within months of the first, as a follow-up.¹¹ The second text was written as part of the epistle to the church at Corinth (also in modern day

⁹Ervin, *Conversion-Initiation and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, 1-3.

¹⁰Howard M. Ervin, *Spirit Baptism: A Biblical Investigation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 5.

¹¹Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 328-334.

Greece) around the year AD 55, to address many issues of concern as a result of disputes and factions in their congregation. Chapter 15 specifically addresses the bodily resurrection of Christ, and thence of all believers “in Christ” sometime in the future.¹²

Paul mentions his personal rapture experience in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, when he was taken to the Third Heaven/Paradise. In this text, the word *harpazo* is specifically used by Paul to describe this experience. He also mentions that this rapture experience had occurred fourteen years earlier. Since the Second Epistle to the Corinthians was written around AD 56,¹³ his rapture experience would have occurred around AD 42 (during his silent years and probably in his home town of Tarsus, in modern day southeastern Turkey or Asia Minor). These silent years of Paul (up to AD 47 or 48, when he set out on his first missionary journey), were when most theologians believe Paul established his Christian theology, which would have included this personal rapture experience.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

According to John F. Walvoord, “1 Thessalonians, probably the first epistle Paul wrote, contributes more to the doctrine of the Rapture than any other book of the New Testament,” and “The Rapture is mentioned in one way or another in every chapter of this book (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11, 23),” and again, “most pretribulationists find basic proof for their positions in 1 Thessalonians,” and finally, “The problem for posttribulationists is that this book presents the Rapture uniformly as an imminent event,

¹²Elwell and Yarbrough, 288-290.

¹³Elwell and Yarbrough, 293.

as if there were no Great Tribulation preceding it.”¹⁴ Ladd agrees that 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 is speaking of the Rapture of the Church, but not prior to the Tribulation, since there is no mention of it in the text. Ladd adds, “We have now completed our survey of the passages which have to do with the Tribulation, the Rapture, and the Resurrection. Nowhere is the Rapture placed before the Tribulation . . . Pretribulationism is an inference in light of which Scripture is interpreted.”¹⁵ Bell adds, based on the commentary of F. F. Bruce, “It is the view of the standard commentators that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians 4-5 against the backdrop of the Olivet discourse.”¹⁶ From these comments both Ladd and Bell mean that Jesus taught the Disciples about his Second Coming (*parousia* in their interpretation) in the Olivet or Apocalyptic Discourse (Matt 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) and mentioned no separate Rapture there. So, when Paul speaks about the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians, he is just amplifying what Jesus taught about His Second Coming in the Gospels and the Rapture will be in conjunction with that event. With that as a backdrop, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 will now be explored.

Verse 13 starts with the focus on believers who are “asleep” or dead in Christ, coupled with Paul’s exhortation not to grieve for them “as those who have no hope.” Their hope (as is all Christians’) is in Jesus’ death, resurrection, and in the future resurrection of their bodies at the “*coming* [emphasis added] of the Lord” (v. 14). In verse

¹⁴John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Findlay, OH: Dunham, 1957; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 197-8.

¹⁵George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 88.

¹⁶Bell, 249.

15, Paul uses the phrase, “by the word of the Lord.” Marvin R. Vincent believes this may refer to a saying transmitted orally or to a direct revelation to Paul.¹⁷ Hicks contends that it was a direct revelation to Paul and probably occurred during his personal rapture experience described in 2 Corinthians 12.¹⁸ The Greek word used in this verse translated “coming,” is *parousia*. Paul goes on to specifically describe the events involved in this *parousia*. The Lord Jesus “will descend from heaven with a shout, the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God.” Vincent points out that this is the only place in Scripture that uses the phrase “descend from heaven” to speak of the Second Coming.¹⁹ This will be accomplished “in just the same way” as He was taken up/raptured at His ascension, per the prophecy of the two angels in Acts 1:11—alone, in the clouds, and in the sight and presence of his believers (body). This *parousia* should be compared to the separate and distinct Second Coming of Christ described by Rev 19:11-16—where Jesus returns to earth on a white horse, with righteousness to judge/wage war, with a sharp sword from his mouth (the Word of God) to smite and rule the nations, with the armies of heaven following on white horses, and is represented by the other Greek word for “coming,” *erchomenon* (from *erchomai*), in Revelation 1:4, 7; 22:7, 12, 20.

Continuing on in verse 16, and the dead in Christ (the Body of Christ, not the Old Testament saints) shall rise first (rise = resurrection). Then, we who are alive and remain

¹⁷Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publications, 1991), 40.

¹⁸Hicks, 24-29.

¹⁹Vincent, 4:41.

shall be “caught up”/raptured (*harpazo*), together with them (the Christians just resurrected in Christ) in the clouds to meet the Lord (still alone) in the air (not on the Earth) and thus we (the Body of Christ) shall always be with the Lord (eternally in His presence; which at this point in time will be in heaven)—verse 17. Paul then tells them to comfort, encourage, and give hope to one another with these words (about the resurrection and Rapture of the Body of Christ/Church). This section of Scripture was paraphrased by Rea at the conclusion of his nine page exegetical study on it:

For this we say unto you by a revelation received from the Lord, that we that are alive, that are still surviving when the parousia of the Lord begins, shall in no way be ahead of them that are already dead. For the Lord Himself shall come down from heaven with a shouted command (to the dead in Christ)—in an archangel-like voice—and with God’s last trumpet-call (to Israel to deal with them again as a nation): and the dead in Christ shall stand up (be resurrected) first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be snatched away from the people on earth, *rescued from the fiery judgements of the tribulation about to begin, and caught up in clouds, to meet the Lord at a glorious reception in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord* [emphasis added].²⁰

1 Thessalonians 5

Rea goes on to say about chapter 5, “This passage should be read right along with the last part of chapter four, about the parousia and the rapture. The artificial chapter-break tends to destroy the connection of thought.”²¹ However; as Norman Geisler states, “Paul’s use of *now* (Gk: *peri de*) indicates a new subject in every place he uses it in his writings.”²² Paul starts chapter 5 by addressing “the times and the epochs” surrounding

²⁰Rea, 90.

²¹Rea, 114.

²²Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 4, *Church/Last Things* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2005), 626.

these events. Vincent states that the plural is used to represent a number of incidents relating to the preparation and accomplishment of the Second Coming occurring at different times. He also highlights the use of *kairos* time in this context to represent a juncture, occasion, right moment of time or the opportune moment.²³

Then in verse 2, Paul speaks of the “day of the Lord,” which is a separate and distinct event from the previously addressed “coming of the Lord.” He uses *erchomai* to say that the day of the Lord will “come.” Here, Ladd points out that the “day of Christ” (mentioned in six other contexts: 1 Cor 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14; Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16) and the “day of the Lord” are the same all-inclusive event under the *Parousia* and represents judgement for unbelievers and salvation for believers.²⁴ Whereas, Walvoord states that “the day of the Lord” is mentioned by Paul at this juncture as a new subject following the Rapture, which was addressed in chapter 4, but tied together in Paul’s overall theme of eschatological times (*chronos*) and dates (*kairos*).²⁵ Traditionally, the Day of the Lord from both the Old and New Testament (Deut 4; Jer 30; Dan 9; 12; Matt 24; Mark 13; 2 Thess 2) is another term for God’s judgement/wrath to be poured out on the earth and unbelievers for sins committed throughout history and will occur during the End Times. Another term for the Day of the Lord is the Tribulation described by Revelation 6-19.²⁶

²³Vincent, 4:43.

²⁴Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 92-4.

²⁵Walvoord, 218-22.

²⁶J. Randall Price, “Old Testament Tribulation Terms,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 82-3.

This Tribulation also implies the need for “deliverance” (*sozo*), “salvation” (*soteria*), or “escape” (*ekpheugo*) from it by the Church.

This very theme of God’s “deliverance from His wrath,” through the “salvation of the Lord Jesus,” is addressed in verses 9 and 10 of this chapter, “for God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” This connects back to the Rapture previously mentioned in chapter 4 by the words, “that whether we are *awake or asleep, we may live together with Him* [emphasis added].” Paul then ties all this together in verse 23; where he says, now may the God of peace (Old Testament name for God—*Yahweh Shalom*—the God of wholeness, completeness and peace mentioned in Judg 6:24) Himself sanctify you entirely (complete sanctification, to be made entirely like Jesus, or glorification, occurring when believers see Jesus face to face per 1 Cor 13:9-12) and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete (again happening when believers see Jesus face to face) . . . at the “coming” (*parousia*) of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul uses the word *parousia* (as opposed to *erchomenon*) in this section to make a clear, separate, and distinct difference between the Rapture of the Church before the Tribulation and the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus after the Tribulation.

Ladd has a different view on the subject of “wrath or tribulation.” Although he completely agrees with idea that Christians will never be subject to God’s wrath, he does however, believe they will go through most of (if not all) the Tribulation, since the “wrath of God” will not be poured out in full until the Second Coming itself (Rev 19:11-6). This is directly preceded by the seventh trumpet and the pouring out of the seven bowls of judgement on the followers of Antichrist and not believers (Rev 11:17-8; 14:9;

and 16:2, 8).²⁷ He clarifies his point of view by saying, “There are however two alternatives to that of a pretribulation rapture. One is that the Church will be raptured toward the end of the Tribulation just before God pours out His wrath upon unbelieving men. This view is usually called midtribulationism . . . There is a second alternative. It is possible, and we believe the Scriptures indicate, that the Church will be on earth throughout the entire period of the Tribulation but will be divinely sheltered from the wrath of God.”²⁸ However, Walvoord sums up his position by saying, “Taken as a whole, the pretribulational point of view gives sense and meaning to 1 Thessalonians 5 and explains why this is introduced after the Rapture. In effect, Paul was saying that the time of the Rapture cannot be determined any more than the time of the beginning of the day of the Lord, but this is of no concern to believers because our appointment is not the wrath of the day of the Lord but rather the salvation that is ours in Christ.”²⁹

2 Thessalonians 1:7–2:17

Paul picks up this eschatological theme again in 2 Thessalonians 1:7–2:17. Remember, this second epistle was written just months after, and as a follow-up to, the first epistle. He starts in verse 7 by talking about the retribution, judgment, and wrath to be poured out on the unbelievers and ungodly (Day of the Lord) at the Second Coming of Christ. Paul uses the word, *apokalupsis* to describe the Second Coming here.

²⁷Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 120-9.

²⁸Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 120-1.

²⁹Walvoord, 233.

He continues on in chapter 2 by reminding them of the *Parousia* and the *episunagoge*, “gathering together to Him” at that time. He uses the term *episunagoge* to reinforce the fact that he is talking about the Rapture. In verse 2, he continues by setting this understanding of the Rapture in juxtaposition to the false teaching that the Day of the Lord has already come. In verse 3, he outlines the timing of these events: it (Day of the Lord) will not come unless the *apostasia* comes first, and the man of lawlessness (Antichrist) is revealed (remember the theological debate over the meaning of the word *apostasia* in this context). For the sake of continuity of thought and Paul’s logic in this contextual setting, it makes perfect sense that *apostasia* be translated, “the departing, departure” (relating to the aforementioned Rapture in verse 1). Therefore, verse 3 may be translated, Let no one in any way deceive you, for it (Day of the Lord, referred to in verse 2) will not come unless the “departing/departure” (Rapture, referred to in verse 1) comes first, and the man of lawlessness (Antichrist) is revealed. Based on this translation, the Rapture and the revealing of the Antichrist precede the Tribulation (Day of the Lord). Paul goes on to talk about the “what,” in verse 6, and “he,” in verse 7, that now restrains the Antichrist from being revealed. Again, there has been much theological debate over what or who this “what” and “he” represents. Traditionally, by pretribulationists, it has been narrowed down to two possibilities: the Holy Spirit or the Body of Christ/Church (spoken of in the “masculine” gender by Paul in 1 Cor 12 and Eph 4).³⁰ On the other hand, Ladd describes the restrainer as God, and that both verses 6 and 7 are saying the same thing: that God restrains “to the end that he may be revealed in his own season” in

³⁰House, 276-7; and Feinberg, 306-8.

verse 6, and “until he come out of the midst” in verse 7.³¹ However, with the end of verse 7 saying, “until *he* [emphasis added] is taken out of the way,” there seems to be a relation to the continuity of Paul’s thought about the “departure” of the Body of Christ/Church in verse 3. Therefore, in keeping with Paul’s flow of thought contextually, it makes sense to interpret the “what” and “he” to mean the Body of Christ/Church. Bell on the other hand states, “It would seem rather obvious that neither the argument for *apostasia* as being the rapture nor the argument for the removal of the restrainer and therefore the church is based on exegetical considerations at all but that they are deductive attempts to locate proof texts for an already accepted doctrine.”³² Despite Bell’s interpretation, up to this point in the passage, everything seems to flow very nicely, neatly, and logically, until reaching verse 8.

In verse 8, Paul talks about the demise and destruction of the Antichrist by, “the appearance of His coming;” or “brightness of His coming” in other translations.³³ This phrase relates to the Second Coming (described by Rev 19:19-20 and by similar word usage in Matt 24:30; Mark 13:26; and Luke 21:27). The problem is that two separate Greek nouns, both in the dative case and which are normally used in singularly distinctive contexts to identify Jesus’ “coming,” are used back to back with the first modifying the second adjectivally (*epiphaneia* modifies *parousia*).³⁴ As has been seen

³¹Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 94-5.

³²Bell, 290.

³³George Ricker Berry, *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 537.

³⁴Zodhiates, *New Testament, KJV*, 682.

thus far, *parousia* is primarily used by Paul to speak of the presence of Christ in the clouds, as part of the *harpazo* (Rapture) of His Church. *Epiphaneia* is used five other times in the New Testament (1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 1:10; 4:1, 8; and Titus 2:13). Using the translation, “manifestation, specifically; *the advent of Christ, past or future* [emphasis added],” and applying it to these five scriptures: three (2 Tim 1:10; 2 Tim 4:1, 8) refer to Jesus’ First Coming; 1 Timothy 6:14 refers to Jesus’ Second Coming; and Titus 2:13 also refers to the Second Coming, preceded by the mention of the “Blessed Hope” (which Ladd believes also refers to the Second Coming).³⁵ However, a separate case can be made that the “Blessed Hope” refers to the Rapture (related to the hope/comfort/encouragement Paul gives to the Thessalonian church in 1 Thess 4:18; 5:11; 2 Thess 2:16-17). In Titus, the “Blessed Hope” is separated from *epiphaneia* by the word “and,” indicating two connected, yet different ideas. All this being said, it appears that Paul’s usage of both *epiphaneia* and *parousia*, back-to-back in 2 Thessalonians 2:8, without a conjunction to separate them, indicates one thought and refers to the brightness, splendor, and glory of the Second Coming of Christ. Paul then continues in verses 13-17 by encouraging the believers to stand firm and hold to the traditions which they were taught because God has chosen them for “salvation” (*soteria*) through sanctification (v. 13), and that they may gain the “glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 14) – (two more inferences to the Rapture).

Conclusion

³⁵Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 11, 13, 162.

As may be seen from these passages in Thessalonians, Paul uses the word, *harpazo* to explicitly describe the Rapture of the Church. He, also almost exclusively, uses the word *parousia* when referring to the “coming” of the Lord Jesus for the Rapture of the Church. He uses other words (such as: *apokalupsis*, *epiphaneia*, *erchomai*) when referring to the Second Coming of Christ, described in Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; and Revelation 19, as a separate and distinct event. Next, to explore whether the use of *harpazo* and *parousia* continues to relate to the Rapture in the other primary Rapture passage—1 Corinthians 15:20-23, 51-53.

1 Corinthians 15

According to Bell, “Together with I Thessalonians 4:13-18, I Corinthians 15:51-57 constitutes one of the clearest passages in the New Testament on the subject of the rapture of the church.”³⁶ Ladd adds, “The Rapture means two things: 1). Union with the Lord . . . 2). The second significance of the Rapture is the transformation of the bodies of living believers.”³⁷ And also, “The mystery of the Rapture therefore is not the truth that the Rapture is to occur before the Great Tribulation. It is the *fact* that the living dead will be bodily transformed at Jesus’ parousia and as a result of the transformation will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and so be ever with the Lord.”³⁸ On the other hand, Walvoord addresses it this way, “In 1 Thessalonians 4, the question was whether those who had died in Christ would have the same benefits and experience as those who were

³⁶Bell, 292.

³⁷Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 78.

³⁸Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 80.

translated. In 1 Corinthians 15, the question is whether those who are translated will have the same experience and benefits as those who have died and who are resurrected. The two passages together give a complete answer to the basic questions concerning the Rapture as an important prophetic event.”³⁹ Walvoord also adds “that the resurrection and translation of the church is declared to be a mystery and, as such, is not included in any passage in the Old Testament dealing with the second coming of Christ . . . the fact that the translation of the church is not mentioned anywhere in the New Testament in a passage that clearly speaks of the coming of Christ after the Great Tribulation.”⁴⁰

The context of 1 Corinthians 15 is Paul’s teaching on the doctrine of resurrection. Within this overarching topic, he makes reference to a significant event occurring two separate times (*parousia* in verse 23 and the “mystery” of all Christians, both dead and alive, being “changed” (*allasso*), in verses 51 and 52). Starting at verse 20, Paul establishes the fact that Jesus Christ was the first whole, complete, normal, perfect human being (as Adam was before the Fall) that was bodily and supernaturally raised from the dead at His “resurrection” (*anastasis*). Verses 21 and 22 emphasize that death (both spiritual and physical) came into the world through the “first man,” Adam’s fall/sin, and therefore; all die as a result. However in Jesus Christ, the “last man,” (the first one resurrected and representative of the first one restored to wholeness and completeness again); all may be restored to life again. In verses 23 and 24, Paul then shows there is an “order” to this resurrection of humanity. Vincent says this is the only New Testament use

³⁹Walvoord, 246.

⁴⁰Walvoord, 248.

of the word “order.” And it means, “use of a band, troop, cohort, standard series, process – band after band rises.”⁴¹ The order is: (1) Jesus first; (2) then, those who are Christ’s at His coming (*parousia*); and (3) then, comes the end (*eschaton*), when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father. Rea explains it this way, “The ‘hour’ of John 5:28, in which all that are in the tombs will hear the voice of the Son of God and will come forth, will include a thousand years or more. This long period will separate the resurrection of life—the first resurrection—from the resurrection of judgment. The literal interpretation of Revelation 20 forces the Bible student to this conclusion. The resurrection of the just (Luke 14:14), or the first resurrection (Rev. 20:5-6), seems to have two or more phases. The New Testament passage which most clearly delineates this order is I Corinthians 15:20-26.”⁴² After the Millennium, the “second resurrection” will occur at the Great White Throne Judgement and consist of unbelievers—Revelation 20:11. Paul then goes on to talk about the resurrection body being different than the normal physical body with which all humanity was born into this world—heavenly, spiritual, and imperishable versus earthly, natural, and perishable. He specifically emphasizes that a new resurrection body is needed to inherit the Kingdom of God/Heaven (v. 50).

Then, Paul focuses on how believers are to gain this new resurrection body to enter the Kingdom of God, in verses 51-53. He starts by using the word, “Behold” to get their attention and then continues by stating he is going to tell them a “mystery.” That

⁴¹Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publications, 1991), 275.

⁴²Rea, 23-4.

“mystery” is the same as was written to the Thessalonians four to five years earlier, but couched in terms of the resurrection of the body. He says, not all Christians will sleep (die), but all will be “changed” (*allasso*)—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be “raised” (*egeiro*) imperishable, and all (both newly resurrected Christians and those who are alive at that time) be “changed” (*allasso*). Vincent makes an interesting point about “twinkling” at this juncture—that the word is only used in this context in the New Testament and generally indicates any rapid movement⁴³ (another inference to the rapid nature of the Rapture of the Church).

Even though *allasso* is used in this context, instead of *harpazo*, it is very clear that Paul is referring to the same event described in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17, as the Rapture of the Church. This is further supported by Paul’s use of similar language in Romans 8:10-23 (11, 23) and Philippians 3:20-21 (21); where he also addresses the idea of “changing” or “transforming” the bodies of Christians into their heavenly resurrection bodies. Next, to explore the remainder of the uses of the word *harpazo*, to see if it is consistently used as a unique term for the Rapture of the Church.

Harpazo in other New Testament Passages

Up to this point, the scripture using the word, *harpazo* has been written by Paul and seemingly relates to the Rapture of the Church. Looking at other authors will change the contextual use of the word and it may or may not take on a new meaning. Good

⁴³Vincent, 3:286.

exegesis and hermeneutics demands that the interpretation be made based on the new author's usage of the word within its specific context.⁴⁴

The word, *harpazo*, is used thirteen times in the New Testament. Five of them specifically relate to raptures (Philip in Acts 8:39, Paul in 2 Cor 12:2-4, Jesus in Rev 12:5, and the Church in 1 Thess 4:17). Of these five uses: 1 Thessalonians 4:17 was addressed above; in Acts 8:39, the Holy Spirit temporarily "caught away" Philip after he ministered to the Ethiopian eunuch and placed him in Azotus, some twenty-thirty miles away (similar to Ezekiel being bodily transported for his visions); in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, Paul twice describes his experience of being temporarily "caught up" to the Third Heaven (again, similar to Ezekiel and to John's experience in Rev 4:1); and in Revelation 12:5, the man child of the Woman (usually interpreted, Jesus) was "caught up" to God and His throne. Most students of prophecy interpret this last rapture to be a vision of Jesus' Ascension. However, at least one student of prophecy interprets this vision to be the Rapture of the Church because *harpazo* is explicitly used (as in 1 Thess 4:17) and the "male child" could be symbolic of the Body of Christ versus Christ Himself. Also, this particular vision is in the middle of Revelation (after chap. 11 and the "Two Witnesses," and before chap. 13 and the "Beast"). There have been many other inferences to the Rapture in Revelation (3:10-11; 4:1-2; 4:4 and 5:9-10; 4-18; 7:9-17; 11:11-13, 11:15-18; 14:14-20; 19:11 – 20:6), but 12:5, is the only one that explicitly uses *harpazo*.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2003), 23-31.

⁴⁵Michael J. Svigel, "The Apocalypse of John and the Rapture of the Church: A Reevaluation," *Trinity Journal* 22 (Spring 2002): 23-74.

Another article, about the Rapture in Revelation, distinguishes between the “Earth Dwellers” or non-elect (Rev 3:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8; 16:9-11; 17:2, 6, 8; and 18:24 – 19:2) and “Heaven Dwellers” or elect (Rev 1:5-7; 5:9-11; 7:9-15; 12:12; 13:6; 19:1-9, 14; and 20:4, 6). The thesis of this article is that the “Hour of Testing,” mentioned in Revelation 3:10 and 6:10, does not appear to begin until 8:13 and is preceded by the Rapture in 7:9. Therefore, the “Heaven Dwellers” are in heaven for the entire Tribulation addressed in Revelation.⁴⁶

The other eight times, *harpazo* is translated, “to forcibly seize upon, snatch away, take to oneself or use force on someone.” These uses are in Matthew 11:12; 13:19; John 6:15; 10:12, 28, 29; Acts 23:10; and Jude 23.⁴⁷ Of these eight citations: two are used of Paul and Jesus being (or potentially being) physically “taken by force” (John 6:15, when the crowd intended to take Jesus by force to make him king; Acts 23:10, when the Romans had to take Paul away by force to save him from the crowd in Jerusalem); five are used by Jesus to describe theoretical entrance into the kingdom of heaven, and possibly to infer the final entrance to the kingdom at the Rapture, (Matt 11:12, the violent taking the kingdom by force; Matt 13:19, Satan coming to snatch away the seed sown in a person’s heart; John 10:12, Satan as the “wolf” who snatches away the sheep; John 10:28-29, no one being able to snatch the sheep from the Father’s hand); and the final use in Jude 23, which speaks of saving others by “snatching” them out of the fire of

⁴⁶A. Boyd Luter and Emily K. Hunter, “The Earth Dwellers and the Heaven Dwellers: An Overlooked Interpretive Key to the Apocalypse,” *Faith and Mission* 20 (2002): 3-9.

⁴⁷Zodhiates, “harpazo,” *New Testament, KJV*, 892-3.

judgment. Here, a case can be made that the Jude 23 citation is a direct inference to the Rapture of the Church.

Jude was the brother of James (leader of the Jerusalem church and who wrote the Epistle of James) and also a half-brother of Jesus. He wrote his short letter to the *kletos*, “called, invited, welcomed appointed . . . one who is called means one who is saved.”⁴⁸ This short epistle was written between AD 70 and 80 against false teachings and false teachers.⁴⁹ This makes it one of the last epistles written.

Verses 5-16 deal with the judgment of false teachers, specifically at the time of the Second Coming. Jude does this by making reference to the apocryphal, non-canonical book of *Enoch* 1:7-9,⁵⁰ in verses 14-15. Starting in verse 17, he addresses the believers by issuing an exhortation to “remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the apostles.” Continuing in verse 18, “In the last time there shall be mockers, following after their ungodly lusts,” and in verse 19, “who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.” Jude’s focus is clearly on the “Last Time” or End Times in these verses and contains similar language to 2 Peter 3. He then continues on to encourage them in verses 20-23 by telling them to, build themselves up on their most holy faith by praying in the Holy Spirit (v. 20) and keep themselves in the love of God, “waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life” (v. 21, and similar language to James 5

⁴⁸Zodhiates, “kletos,” *Dictionary*, 869-70.

⁴⁹Charles Caldwell Ryrie, ed., *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 1890.

⁵⁰Matthew Black, *The Book of Enoch or I Enoch; A New English Edition with Commentary and Textual Notes* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), 26.

about the imminent Rapture). Then in verse 23, Jude encourages them to “save” (*sozo*) others by “snatching” them (*harpazo*) out of the fire (another inference to the “deliverance” from wrath theme). Therefore, it appears that this usage of *harpazo* also seems to refer to the Rapture of the Church.

All the uses of *harpazo*, except for 1 Thessalonians 4:17, seem to speak of an individual rapture as compared to the collective Body of Christ. However, they could still be individual New Testament (apocalyptic) confirmations of the Old Testament (prophetic) raptures and precursors to the collective Rapture of the Church (especially Jesus’ Ascension at the beginning of the Church Age). The other New Testament Greek words that are similar to *harpazo*, and used in related passages, were addressed in chapter 1, but shall be quickly reviewed next.

Episunagoge is used by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, referring to the “gathering together” of believers to meet Jesus at His *Parousia* (the Rapture, previously addressed in 1 Thess 4:17). *Analambano* is used in Mark 16:19 and Acts 1:2, 11, 22 to describe Jesus’ Ascension (rapture). The same word is used in the Septuagint in 2 Kings 2:9-11 to describe Elijah’s rapture. It is also used in the Septuagint to describe Ezekiel being “bodily lifted up” by the Spirit of God for his visions. Two other words, related to *analambano*, are used by Luke in Acts 1 to refer to the Ascension of Jesus: in verse 9, *epairo*, meaning, “to be raised up, to be taken up, or to be borne upward;” and in verse 10, *poreuomai*, meaning, “to depart, go away or toward someplace.” A related word, *anabaino*, meaning “to go up, arise, ascend up, climb up or come up,” is used in Revelation 4:1 when John is told to “*come up* [emphasis added] here” by Jesus.

Metatithemi is used in both Hebrews 11:5 and in Genesis 5:24, in the Septuagint, to describe the “translation” (rapture) of Enoch to heaven. This word is related to *allasso*, used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 to describe what happens to the believer’s body at the Rapture, and to *metamorphoo*, used by Matthew and Mark to describe Jesus’ appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-9; Luke 9:28-36).

The verb *ekpheugo* is used in Luke 21:36 to describe the believers being able to “escape” the “great distress upon the land, and wrath to this people” (Tribulation) and to stand before Jesus (another inference to the Rapture). It is also used in Romans 2:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:3; and Hebrews 2:3; 12:25 in reference to “escaping” the judgment of God. The verb *sozo* is used in Romans 5:9 to describe believers being “saved from” the wrath of God, and in the Septuagint to describe the following: the “rescue” of Lot and his family in Genesis 19:17-22; Jacob’s “surviving” the encounter with the angel in Genesis 32:30; and in Daniel 12:1 to describe Daniel’s people being “saved from” the “time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time” (the time of distress = the Tribulation). The noun *soteria* is used in: Hebrews 11:7 to describe Noah and his family’s “deliverance” from the Flood; in Exodus 14:13; 15:2, in the Septuagint, to describe the “deliverance” of Israel from Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea; and in 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 1:14; 9:28; and 1 Peter 1:5; 2 Peter 3:15 to describe believers being “saved” from the wrath of God (poured out during the Tribulation).

With all of this testimony considered, it appears that the term “rapture” can pertain to an individual or a group of individuals. However, the primary and related

Rapture Passages appear to apply to an isolated, unique event involving the Body of Christ (Church) and occurring prior to the Tribulation (Day of the Lord, or Daniel's 70th week). Next, to explore the remainder of the uses of *parousia* to see if they are consistently used as a unique term to describe the "coming" of the Lord associated with the Rapture of the Church.

Parousia in other New Testament Passages

Up to this point, all the scriptures using the word *parousia* have been written by Paul and seemingly relate to the Rapture of the Church (except for the combination of *epiphaneia* and *parousia* in 2 Thess 2:8 mentioned above). Looking at another author will change the contextual use of the word and it may or may not take on a new meaning. Therefore, each citation must be taken on a case-by-case basis, and the interpretation must be based on the new author's usage of the word within its specific context.⁵¹ Also, remember the treatment of *parousia* in chapter 1. Its meaning may be summed up quickly by saying, "Present, presence, a being present, a coming to a place . . . A technical term used of the coming of Christ . . . Thus, the coming of the Lord or His *parousia* consists of several comings which are in reality stages of a continuous process."⁵² However, Ladd differs in his treatment of the word by saying, "It is not 'presence' so much as the 'coming' of Christ which is required in the verses we have just discussed. It is at the coming, the advent of Christ, that the dead will be raised and the living caught up;

⁵¹Fee and Stuart, 23-31.

⁵²Zodhiates, "parousia," *Dictionary*, 1123-4.

‘presence’ does not fit . . . the parousia of Christ is His second coming, and it will bring both salvation and judgment: salvation of the saints, and judgment of the world.”⁵³

Parousia is used in the following verses: 1 Corinthians 16:17; 2 Corinthians 7:6, 7; 10:10; Philippians 1:26; 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; and 2 Peter 1:16. All these uses, except for the one in 2 Peter 1:16, refer to being “in the presence of someone” other than Jesus (for example: Silas, Titus, Paul himself, and Satan). The usage of *parousia* in 2 Peter 1:16 refers back to the “transfigured” (*metamorphoo*) presence of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-9; Luke 9:28-36). This may be seen as a prophetic time precursor to Jesus’ post-resurrection apocalyptic time ascension (rapture) to Heaven, described in Acts 1. *Parousia* is also used in Matthew 24, James 5, 2 Peter 3, and 1 John 2. All of these appear, at first glance, to refer to the Rapture of the Church. However, a careful study will be made of each of these usages. Before that, it should be mentioned that there is another inference to the Rapture, found in Hebrews 9:28, which does not use the word *parousia*. Instead, the word *optanomai*, meaning, “to see, to perceive, to look at . . . not merely seeing but also the actual perception of what one sees . . . in this case, to be seen, appear” is used to communicate the concept.⁵⁴ This usage will also be addressed, after the other four are explored.

Matthew 24

The Gospel of Matthew, although probably written in the AD 60’s, was set in an Old Testament prophetic time context. It was written with a Jewish audience in mind

⁵³Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 65.

⁵⁴Zodhiates, “optanomai,” *Dictionary*, 1052.

from a Jewish perspective by a converted Jewish tax collector, the Apostle Matthew (Levi).⁵⁵ It was probably written originally in Hebrew and later written in Greek.⁵⁶

The Hebrew word for “coming” used in Matthew 24 is *bow*, meaning, “to go or come, bring.” Although different forms of this word are used in Matthew 24, the same meaning is applied to all usages.⁵⁷ However, the usage in verse 30, “the Son of Man *coming* [emphasis added] on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory,” is a specific reference back to Daniel 7:13, which was written in Aramaic. The Aramaic word *athah*, meaning, “to arrive: come, bring”⁵⁸ was used by Daniel in that verse. The word used for *athah*, in the Septuagint, is *erchomenos* (a form of *erchomai*).⁵⁹ This Hebraic text and usage of the word will be compared to the Greek text where two separate words are used (*parousia* and *erchomai*). Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 are considered to be Jesus’ Apocalyptic or Olivet Discourse regarding the End Times. However, *parousia* is only used by Matthew in his account and then only in certain places, as compared to *erchomai*. The theory that *parousia* is uniquely used to describe the Rapture as a separate

⁵⁵Elwell and Yarbrough, 78-85.

⁵⁶Papias, *Fragments of Papias* 6 (ANF 1:154-5); Eusebius, *The Church History of Eusebius* 3.24.6, n. 5 (NPNF 1:152-3); and 3.39.16 (NPNF 1:173).

⁵⁷*The New Testament in Hebrew and English* (Edgware, Middlesex, UK: The Society of Distributing the Holy Scriptures to the Jews, 1981), 52-55.

⁵⁸William Wilson, “come,” *Old Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1978), 82-6; and George V. Wigram, “athah,” *The New Englishman’s Hebrew Concordance* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984), 182-3.

⁵⁹Brenton, 1061.

event from the Second Coming (as Paul did), will be tested by Matthew's use of the word in the Greek text of chapter 24.

Previous to this in chapter 23, Jesus was talking to the Pharisees about the kingdom of heaven (God) and the future of Jerusalem, while at the Temple. He concludes in verse 39 by saying, "For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, 'Blessed is He who *comes* (*erchomai*) in the name of the Lord!'" Apparently, this is a statement about the Nation of Israel not accepting Jesus as the Messiah until His Second Coming.⁶⁰

Next in 24:1-2, Jesus came out of the Temple. And after the disciples had pointed out the Temple buildings to Him, He said, "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." One now knows that Jesus was prophesying about the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans in AD 70 (fulfilled some forty years after He made the prophetic declaration). The first use of the word *parousia* is in verse 3, where the disciples ask three questions, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your *coming* (*parousia*), and of the end of the age?" The context of the questions, clearly points to the events surrounding the Old Testament prophecies of the Day of the Lord and the Messiah establishing His kingdom on earth. This is evidenced by a similar question from the disciples just prior to Jesus' ascension in Acts 1:6, "is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" Matthew's account alone contains three questions, the other two accounts only two (excluding the question about Jesus'

⁶⁰Ryrie, 1489.

Parousia). Therefore, since Matthew alone uses *parousia*, he was the only one of the three Gospel writers of the account of the apocalyptic discourse to be present as an eyewitness, he uses *erchomai* in other places in this text, and he had no concept of the Church as the new Theocratic Nation in God's plan, *parousia* in this text probably refers to Jesus' "coming" for His own holy people (the holy Jews or the restored Jewish Nation referred to in Daniel 12:1). According to Stanley D. Toussaint, because of the passage's strict Jewishness, neither the Church nor the Rapture of the Church is in view at all in Matthew 24.⁶¹

Jesus then proceeds to answer their questions, starting in verse 4 (from a Jewish believer's perspective in prophetic time, looking toward apocalyptic time). He chronicles the first 3 ½ year period of the Tribulation through verse 14. And then, He speaks of the "Abomination of Desolation, spoken of through Daniel the prophet," in verse 15. This becomes the dividing point of the Tribulation period and starts the Great Tribulation (last 3 ½ years, as mentioned in verse 21). He then shifts to answering the question about his future "coming" in verse 23, by warning them not to be misled by false christs and false prophets. In verse 25, He emphasizes this point by saying, "Behold, I have told you in advance." He then goes on to describe His "coming" in verse 26, by saying what it will not be (based on any human knowledge, wisdom, or origin). And then in verse 27, He says what it will be (based on heavenly origin, like lightning).

⁶¹Stanley D. Toussaint, "Are the Church and the Rapture in Matthew 24?" in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 249-50.

Verses 27-31 describe his “coming.” However, based on the Greek text, there appears to be two separate “comings” described, instead of two separate references to one “coming.” The first “coming” is contained in verse 27, using the word *parousia*. The exact same language is used by Luke in 17:24, and contains similar language to Paul’s description of the Rapture in 1 Corinthians 15 (“just as lightning comes . . .” compared to “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye”). The second “coming” is contained in verses 30-31, using the word *erchomenon* as “coming with power and great glory” (as described in Dan 7:13, in the Septuagint, Matt 16:27; Mark 13:26; Luke 21: 27; and Rev 19:11-16). These two distinct “comings” are separated by verses describing: the Battle of Armageddon, the conclusion of the Tribulation, Old Testament quotes about the “day of the Lord” and the “sign of the Son of Man” appearing in the sky. Then, associated with the *erchomenon* “coming” in verse 31, the angels will “gather together His *elect* [emphasis added] from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.” Those who believe in a Posttribulation Rapture (in conjunction with the Second Coming) use this verse (and related verses in Mark and Luke) to establish their position. However, the question remains, who are the “elect” that the “angels are gathering” at this “coming?” In the Greek, the word *eklektos* is used. This means, “chosen, select, by implication chosen with accessory idea of kindness, favor and love . . . to arrive at the proper conclusion of who the elect are in each instance of its occurrence the context has to be taken into account. In Matthew 24:22, 24 and Mark 13:20-22, it is evident that the elect are only those who will be saved during the tribulation, not all the saved of all generations.”⁶²

⁶²Zodhiates, “eklektos,” *Dictionary*, 545.

If one follows the logic that this whole discourse of Jesus is directed at the Jewish Nation, then the “elect” would be the Jewish Nation which accepts Jesus as the Messiah at His Second Coming. They would be joined by the Old Testament Saints already in Paradise—from one end of the heavens to the other.⁶³ Also note that the angels do the gathering in this instance, compared to Jesus Himself doing the gathering in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, at the Rapture of the Church.

This description of the “comings” in Matthew 24 is almost identical to Luke’s in 17:22-37; except Luke uses, “so will the Son of Man be *in His day* [emphasis added],” instead of *parousia* (although Bruce Metzger comments that some readings of this phrase do contain *parousia*)⁶⁴ to describe the first “coming” and *apokalupto*, “to remove a veil or covering exposing to open view what was before hidden, to make manifest or reveal a thing”⁶⁵ to describe the second “coming.” If this passage in Luke 17 is combined with Jesus’ Apocalyptic Discourse in Luke 21 (where an inference is made to the Rapture in v. 36, “to escape (*ekpheugo*) all these things that are about to take place and stand before the Son of Man”), a case can be made that Luke is also putting an apocalyptic time interpretation into Jesus’ prophetic time discourse. This may be further confirmed by the use of *parousia* in Jesus’ relating the first “coming” (of the two “comings”) to the days of Noah in Matthew 24:37-39 and *erchomai* to the second “coming” to the faithful householder and the wise servant in verses 42-51. Noah and his family were “saved”

⁶³Toussaint, 242-3.

⁶⁴Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, rev. ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1975), 167.

⁶⁵Zodhiates, “apokalupto,” *Dictionary*, 224-5.

(*sozo*) from the flood by God a week (strikingly similar to Daniel’s 70th week) before the Flood came (Gen 7:4). In the other two parables of Matthew 24, the focus is on the Day of the Lord coming “like a thief” or “on a day when the servant does not expect” (similar to Paul’s description of the Day of the Lord coming in 1 Thess 5:2).

From Matthew’s single use of the word *bow* to refer to “coming” in Hebrew, one would assume that Jesus was only talking about a single “coming” at the end of the Tribulation for the Jewish Nation. However, taking the same text in Greek, a case can be made that Matthew’s apparent separate use of the words *parousia* and *erchomai* describes two separate “comings” related to the Lord’s apocalyptic Second Coming. It also may be an extrapolated interpretation to say that the specific use of *parousia* in this text is an inference to the Rapture (of the new Theocratic Nation to replace Israel—the Church), since it was written in the setting of prophetic time and the disciples did not understand it as such at the time of the Apocalyptic Discourse by Jesus. The conflict of the interpretation of the Hebrew text and the Greek text may be explained by scribes, redactors, or editors writing the later Greek text for Matthew and inserting the apocalyptic time knowledge of the Rapture into the prophetic time words of Jesus. This same idea of commingling and confusing prophetic and apocalyptic time contexts could explain coming up with a similar interpretation when combining both passages in Luke 17 and 21.

All this considered and in the final analysis, it seems the most appropriate interpretation should rely on the Hebraic rendition and disregard the use of *parousia* in the Greek. Another way of saying this would be that the uses of *erchomai* and *parousia*

by Matthew in this text are interchangeable. This appears to be confirmed by the fact that there is no other writing of Matthew to compare to his usage of *parousia* in this context. Next, the use of *parousia* in James 5, 2 Peter 3 and 1 John 2 will be explored.

James 5:7-8

The Epistle of James was written by the James, the half-brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church, to the Jewish Christians “dispersed abroad” around AD 45; making it probably the first of the New Testament Books written.⁶⁶ This would have been three years after Paul’s revelation of the Rapture of the Church and before the beginning of Paul’s public ministry. However, Paul, shortly after his conversion (AD 33-34),⁶⁷ was introduced to James and the other Apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-30), stayed a short while, and was sent back to Tarsus. Then Paul, in his letter to the Galatians (written late AD 48/early AD 49)⁶⁸ mentions specifically that he met with Peter and James on another occasion three years after his conversion (AD 36-37). All this to say, Paul had a relationship with James and could have shared his revelation regarding the Rapture with James before he wrote this epistle in AD 45. Another possibility is that the Holy Spirit could have directly revealed it to James, as He did with Paul.

Since this epistle was also written with a Jewish mindset, it can be treated similarly to Matthew (although it was written within the apocalyptic time setting and with

⁶⁶Ryrie, 1856.

⁶⁷H. Wayne House, *Chronological and Background Charts of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 127.

⁶⁸House, *Charts of the New Testament*, 127.

a working picture of the Church clearly in view). *Parousia* is mentioned in 5:7-8, where believers are encouraged to “be patient” until the *Parousia* of the Lord. Then a brief analogy is given of the farmer waiting for both the early and late rains before the produce comes (a picture of the growing season in Palestine/possible prophetic inference to the two distinct “comings” of the Lord). According to Vincent, this is the only such use in the New Testament—the early rains were Oct.-Dec. through Jan./Feb. and late rains were in Mar./Apr. (per 1 Sam 12:16-18, rain during the harvest was considered a miracle).⁶⁹ Then, another exhortation is given to Christians to be patient and to strengthen their hearts, “for the *parousia* of the Lord is *at hand* [emphasis added]” (“imminent,” from *eggizo*, meaning, “to bring near, come near or approach”).⁷⁰ This is the same type of language Paul uses to instill the “Blessed Hope” of the *Parousia* in believers. Therefore, this use of *parousia* by James seems to be related to the Rapture of the Church (and lays a foundation for the “imminency” of the Rapture). However, Biederwolf suggests that in view of the “judge is standing right at the door,” verse 9 indicates that the *Parousia* is the Second Coming: a day of blessing for Christians and judgment for the ungodly.⁷¹

2 Peter 3

The Second Epistle of Peter was written by Peter the Apostle, subsequent to the first epistle from Rome around AD 66 and very shortly before his crucifixion. It was

⁶⁹Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 761-2.

⁷⁰Zodhiates, “eggizo,” *Dictionary*, 495.

⁷¹William E. Biederwolf, *The Second Coming Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1924; reprint, 1985), 521-2.

written to “those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours.”⁷² As mentioned above, and by Peter himself at the end of this chapter, Peter was well acquainted with Paul’s eschatological teachings (including the Rapture). As mentioned previously, Peter mentions *parousia* in 1:16, with regards to the Transfiguration of Jesus.

Peter then, starts chapter 3 by reminding believers of this being the second letter he has written concerning “the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles” (vv. 1-2). Continuing on, he says, in the Last Days mockers will come saying, “Where is the promise of His coming [emphasis added] (*parousia*)?” Biederwolf again states that *parousia* here refers to the Second Coming.⁷³ Ever since the fathers fell asleep/died, nothing has changed since the beginning of creation (v.4, a satirical inference to the coming resurrection). Peter then gives the analogy about the Flood destroying the world at that time (again inferring that Noah and his family—the righteous—were “delivered” (*sozo*) through it) as a precursor to the destruction of the world in the future by the fire and judgement of God (vv. 5-7).

In verses 8 and 9, Peter speaks about the perfect timing of God (*kairos* versus *chronos*) and clarifies the extent of God’s grace and mercy associated with His promise (a new heavens and a new earth in v. 13), because of His desire for “all to come to repentance.” Continuing in verse 10, he equates the Day of the Lord (coming like a thief, previously alluded to by Paul and Matthew) to the destruction of the world (Tribulation).

⁷²Ryrie, 1872.

⁷³Biederwolf, 526.

And since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought they to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the “coming” (*parousia*) of the “day of God” (completely different term than “day of the Lord”)—verses 11-12. Biederwolf inserts here that the phrase “coming of the day of God” is only used in this text and the only place where the *parousia* of a day is mentioned.⁷⁴ Then in verse 15, Peter encourages them to regard the patience of the Lord (regarding His promise, yet to be fulfilled) to be *soteria* (rescue, safety, deliverance, salvation). Peter then commends Paul’s writings on “these things” (the promise of Jesus’ *Parousia* and the Day of the Lord to occur in the Last Days) to them. Peter is, in a way, deferring to Paul as the “expert” on this specific revelation of God regarding the Rapture (possibly because of Paul’s personal Rapture experience). Again, based on this exegesis, *parousia* can be used in this context to speak of the “deliverance” from the wrath of God (Tribulation, or Day of the Lord) by the Rapture of the Church.

1 John 2 and 3

The First Epistle of John was written by John the Apostle, probably after his Gospel and before Revelation around AD 90 to his “little children” in the faith.⁷⁵ In chapter 2, John talks about discerning truth from lie by the “anointing from the Holy One” (the Holy Spirit). In verse 28 he says, abide in Him (Jesus), so that when He “appears” (*phaneroo*), we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His “coming” (*parousia*). This verse links *phaneroo* and *parousia* in John’s writing

⁷⁴Biederwolf, 532.

⁷⁵Ryrie, 1878.

and is clearly a reference to the Rapture. This can be confirmed by his usage in 1 John 3:2, where he says, “We know that, when He “appears” (*phaneroo*), we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is” (a clear reference to seeing Jesus face to face as in 1 Thess 5 and 1 Cor 13). Biederwolf again relates this use of *parousia* to the Second Coming, even though it is the only mention of “appearance” in relation to the Second Coming by John.⁷⁶

What is interesting is that John uses other words to address this “coming” in other contexts. In John 14:3 he quotes Jesus as saying, if I go and prepare a place for you, I will “come again” (*erchomai palin*—the only such reference in the New Testament),⁷⁷ and *paralambano* (to take near, to receive to oneself)⁷⁸ you to Myself. In Revelation 4:1, John records the prophetic words of Jesus to himself, “Come up (*anabaino*) here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.” On the other hand, in Revelation 12:1-5, the Woman “clothed with the sun and moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars;” (representing the Nation of Israel) giving birth to a “male child” (representing Jesus); whom the “red dragon” (representing Satan) wanted to devour, but who was “*caught up* [emphasis added] to God and His throne,” John uses the exact word for rapture (*harpazo*) to describe the Ascension of Jesus. As mentioned above, this use of *harpazo* could also be a symbolic reference to the Rapture of the Church. The reference in 1 John 2 is clearly speaking of the Rapture. Yet, when compared to the other

⁷⁶Biederwolf, 536.

⁷⁷*The Online Greek Bible*, “erchomai palin.”

⁷⁸Zodhiates, “paralambano,” *Dictionary*, 1108-9.

references by John, *parousia* is not as clearly, or distinctively, used to refer to the Rapture as with Paul, James, and Peter (although, his use of *harpazo* is made expressly clear).

Hebrews 9:28

Hebrews 9:28 is the last citation to be considered. As mentioned above, *parousia* is not used at all in this context, but rather *optanomai*, meaning, “appear, look, see, show self.” The writer of Hebrews is unknown, yet has an excellent command of Old Testament Jewish theology, as well as New Testament Christian theology and Christology. The book was probably written between AD 64 and 68 and the theme is “the superiority of Christ and of Christianity.”⁷⁹ Hebrews 9 talks about the Old Covenant priesthood compared to Jesus as the Priest of the New Covenant. This chapter finishes with verses 27-28 [emphasis added], “it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgement, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, shall appear (*optanomai*) a second time (similar to *come again* in John 14:3) for *salvation* (*soteria*, not judgment of the Second Coming) without reference to sin (since it was dealt with at the First Coming through the Atonement), to those who eagerly await Him (Christians versus unbelievers).” This appears to be a clear inference to the deliverance from judgment theme of the Rapture previously addressed above. However, Biederwolf again equates this “second appearance” to the Second Coming.⁸⁰ Of interesting note is the commentary note made by Ephraem the Syrian in his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* on 9:28, “Then, ‘he will appear a second time,’ not in order to die for the

⁷⁹Ryrie, 1836.

⁸⁰Biederwolf, 514.

sins, for which he has already died once, but in order to appear in a new world, where there will be no sins on the part of those who in hope expect salvation through him.”⁸¹

Conclusion

The traditional Rapture Passages, written by Paul, seem to outline a separate and distinct “coming” from the Second Coming of Jesus; which occurs before the Tribulation (wrath of God/Day of the Lord) and the revealing of the Antichrist for the Church/Body of Christ. Paul uses a distinct word in the Greek to highlight the actual event (*harpazo* = Rapture of the Church). Paul also uses a distinct word in Greek to separate the “coming” (*parousia*) of the Lord Jesus for His Church, and the Rapture (*harpazo*) associated with it, from the Second “Coming” (*erchomenon*), as seen by John in Revelation 19.

This idea of a separate and distinct “coming for His Church” (Rapture), outlined by Paul, is attested to by James, Peter, and John (and possibly Matthew, Luke, the writer of Hebrews, Jude, and even Jesus Himself). Individual raptures are recorded both in the Old and New Testaments as matters of fact. The examples of Philip, Paul, John, and especially Jesus (as a precursory start of the Church Age) are used by God to prophetically represent the actual Rapture of the Church at the end of the Church Age (as prophetically revealed by Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation leading up to John’s rapture in 4:1-2). Note the following chart comparison, created by Edward E. Hindson, which graphically depicts the differences between these two separate and distinct eschatological events.

⁸¹Thomas C. Oden, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament*, vol. 10 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 147.

Contrast between the Rapture and the Return

<u>Rapture</u>	<u>Return</u>
1. Christ comes <u>for</u> His own (John 14:3. 1 Thess. 14:17; 2 Thess. 2:1).	1. Christ comes <u>with</u> His own (1 Thess. 3:13; Jude 14; Rev. 19:14).
2. He comes in the <u>air</u> (1 Thess. 4:17).	2. He comes to the <u>earth</u> (Zech. 14:4; Acts 1:11).
3. He <u>claims</u> His bride (1 Thess. 4:16-17).	3. He comes <u>with</u> His bride (Rev. 19:6-14).
4. Removal of <u>believers</u> (1 Thess. 4:17).	4. Manifestation of <u>Christ</u> (Mal. 4:2).
5. <u>Only</u> His own see Him (1 Thess. 4:13-18).	5. <u>Every eye</u> shall see Him (Rev. 1:7).
6. <u>Tribulation</u> begins (2 Thess. 1:6-9).	6. Millennial <u>kingdom</u> begins (Rev. 20:1-7).
7. Saved are <u>delivered from wrath</u> (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9).	7. Unsaved <u>experience the wrath</u> of God (Rev. 6:12-17).
8. <u>No signs</u> precede the rapture (1 Thess. 5:1-3).	8. <u>Signs</u> precede the second coming (Luke 21:11, 15). ⁸²

It is this understanding of two separate and distinct “comings,” as part of Daniel’s 70th Week, which will be explored in the next chapter of this thesis. The writings of the Early Church Fathers will be examined to determine if they understood the Rapture in this same way, recorded it in their writings as such, and subsequently passed it on to the Early Church as a doctrine. If so, an examination will be conducted to see if this belief was continued to be passed down through Church History as an accepted belief.

⁸²Edward E. Hindson, “The Rapture and the Return: Two Aspects of Christ’s Coming,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 157.

CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF EARLY CHURCH FATHERS AND MEDIEVAL CHURCH WRITINGS UP TO THE YEAR 1750

Introduction

Based on the exegetical study conducted in chapter 2, a review of the Patristic, Ante-Nicene, Nicene, and Post-Nicene Fathers' writings will now be conducted. There is no need to prove that the Early Church Fathers were premillennialists (millenarians, chiliasts), since that is a presupposition of the author and the conclusion of many modern theologians also, including: Geisler,¹ Paul L. King,² Hauser, Jr.,³ J. Dwight Pentecost,⁴ Le Roy Edwin Froom,⁵ Jesse Forest Silver,⁶ and Ladd. This is best summed up by Ladd, "with one exception [Caius] there is no Church Father before Origen who opposed the millenarian interpretation, and there is no one before Augustine whose extant writings offer a different interpretation of Revelation 20 than that of a future earthly kingdom

¹Geisler, 567-71.

²King, 1, 8-10.

³Hauser, Jr., 232.

⁴J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Dunham Publishing Co., 1958, reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 373-78.

⁵Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers, The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation*, vol. 1 (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1950), 207.

⁶ Jesse Forest Silver, *The Lord's Return: Seen in History and in Scripture as Premillennial and Imminent*, rev. ed. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1914), 49-69.

consonant with the natural interpretation of the language.”⁷ There is also quite a case to be made that the Fathers believed in the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is discussed by: Geisler,⁸ James F. Stitzinger,⁹ Walvoord,¹⁰ and Pentecost.¹¹ This may best be summed up by a quote from Larry Crutchfield in Geisler’s book, “The student of patristic literature quickly discovers that the position of the early fathers on the Tribulation and its relation to the saints and Christ’s return is impossible to decipher and synthesize completely. Many of them, especially in the first century, make explicit statements which indicate a belief in the imminent return of Christ. The doctrine of imminence is especially prominent in the writings of the apostolic fathers.”¹² This is further amplified by another Crutchfield quote from Stitzinger’s article, “This view of the fathers on imminency, and, in some, references to escaping the time of Tribulation, constitute what may be termed, to quote Erickson, ‘seeds from which the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture could be developed . . .’ Had it not been for the drought in sound exegesis, brought on by Alexandrian allegorism and later by Augustine, one wonders

⁷George Eldon Ladd, *Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), 23.

⁸Geisler, 655-57.

⁹James F. Stitzinger, “The Rapture in Twenty Centuries of Biblical Interpretation” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 13 (2002): 153-56.

¹⁰Walvoord, 50-54.

¹¹Pentecost, 168-9, 202-3.

¹²Larry V. Crutchfield, “The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation in the Apostolic Fathers,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), 101; quoted in Geisler, 657.

what kind of crop those seeds may have yielded—long before J. N. Darby and the nineteenth century.”¹³

With this foundation being laid, the purpose of this review is to see if the Fathers specifically understood the Second Coming as involving two separate and distinct events as part of Daniel’s 70th Week in the same way as Paul taught it. And then, whether they recorded it in their writings as such (and thereby passed it on to the Early Church as a belief or doctrine). Then, further review of subsequent orthodox writings of the Church (including the Creeds of the Church) will be explored, up to the year 1750, to see if this belief in the Rapture of the Church continued to be passed down through Church History as an accepted orthodox belief.

First, a review of all the writings will be conducted to see if the Greek word Paul used for Rapture, *harpazo*, (and related words) was used by the Fathers, and if so, in what context. Then, a comparison of the two primary Greek words used for the Second Coming (*erchomai* and *parousia*) will be made to see if there is a purposeful difference in usage as there was in Paul’s writings (*parousia* in relation to the imminent Rapture of the Church and *erchomai* in relation to the Second Coming to judge the world). Next, the writings will be reviewed to see if there are any direct references to the Rapture of the Church; using Bell’s four criteria outlined in chapter 1:

- (1) Any mention that Christ’s second coming was to consist of more than one phase, separated by an interval of years.
- (2) Any mention that Christ was to remove the church from the earth before the tribulation period.
- (3) Any reference to the resurrection of the just as being in two stages.

¹³Crutchfield, 103; quoted in James F. Stitzinger, “The Rapture in Twenty Centuries of Biblical Interpretation.” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 13 (2002): 156.

- (4) Any indication that Israel and the church were to be clearly distinguished, thus providing some rationale for a removal of Christians before God “again deals with Israel.”¹⁴

Next, a review will be made to check for inferences to the Rapture, using any of the criteria above, references to Rapture passages, or symbolic inferences or allusions to the event as separate and distinct from the Second Coming itself. All these investigations into the writings will be done in the order outlined above, starting with the earliest, the Apostolic Fathers (closest to the Apostles in both time and teaching) and going to the Post-Nicene Fathers. Finally, the review will continue from that point chronologically up to the year 1750 (80 yrs. before the proposed dispensationalist “Secret Rapture Theory”).

Uses of *Harpazo* and Related Terms by the Fathers

First, an exploration of the uses of *harpazo* by the Fathers, and then of other Greek terms related to it (*allasso*, *anabaino*, *analambano*, *apostasis*, as a departure, *ekpheugo*, *epairo*, *episunagoge*, *metamorphoo*, *metatithemi*, *poreuomai*, and *sozo*) will be conducted. Of the uses of *harpazo*, the only concern is with the ones relating to rapture. There are five other uses of *harpazo* by the Fathers relating to: (1) snatch, seize and carry off, (2) claim, take, (3) met, claim, appropriate, (4) overpower, rule, and (5) rescue.¹⁵ The citation for “rescue” will be addressed after the ones for rapture.

The first three citations have to do with Paul’s reference to his personal rapture in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4. Caesarius Nazianzenus (4th century) makes reference to Paul being

¹⁴Bell, 26-27.

¹⁵G. W. H. Lampe, ed. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 228-9.

raptured to Paradise in his *dialogi*.142. Didymus Alexandrinus (d. 398) makes reference to Paul's humility in explaining his rapture experience in his *fragmenta in 2 Cor*. Finally, John Chrysostom (d. 407) discourages speculations on its exact nature and addresses the reason for it (to justify Paul being an Apostle) in his *homiliae in 2 Cor*.26.1.¹⁶ There has been further conjecture about the purpose for Paul's rapture and subsequent revelations. Hicks believes that the Lord caught Paul up to heaven to reveal to him about the Rapture of the Church, which he then outlined in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15.¹⁷

The next set of citations address other raptures. Macarius Aegyptius (Magnus, d. 390), in a direct reference to the Rapture of the Church, speaks of the bodies of the saints, "which will be caught up into heaven by glory which is in their souls on earth," in his *homiliae spirituales*.6.11. Didymus Alexandrinus mentions the rapture of Elijah in his *fragmenta in 2 Cor*.12.2. Evagrius Ponticus (d. 399) speaks of reaching a rapturous state of being while in prayer in his *de oratione*.52. Philoxenus (d. 523) speaks of the rapture of Ezekiel in his *epistula*.3. Finally, Maximus Confessor (d. 662) speaks of the rapture of the mind while in prayer in his *capitulum de caritate quattuor centuriae*.2.6.¹⁸ The one citation dealing with the Rapture as a "rescue" is addressed next. Georgius Pisida Poeta (7th cent.) says that to your way of understanding, he is willing to rescue you from the bloody tribulation, in his *carmina in edita*.3.50.¹⁹

¹⁶Lampe, 1:229, par. 6a.

¹⁷Hicks, 24-26.

¹⁸Lampe, 1:229, par. 6b.

¹⁹Lampe, 1:229, par. 5.

The Greek word *episunagoge* is mentioned as the eschatological gathering of the faithful to Christ by: Dionysius Alexandrinus (d. 264) in Eusebius' *historia ecclesiasticae*.7.24.5, Eusebius (d. 399), himself, in his *demonstratio evangelica*.2.3, and Cyrillus Alexandrinus (d. 444) in his *commentarius in John.3.4*.²⁰ *Metatithemi* (to translate persons) is used to address rapture by: Clement of Rome (1st cent.), to describe Enoch's rapture in his *First Epistle to the Corinthians*.9.3; Irenaeus (d. 202), who says, "Enoch was translated, thus pointing out by anticipation the translation of the just and that those who were translated into Paradise, as a prelude to immortality will remain there until the completion of the age," in his *Against Heresies*.5.5.1; Methodius (d. 311) in his *de resurrectione mortuorum*.3.5, and Hippolytus Thebanus (8th cent.) in his *fragmenta*.8c5 (both said that a Christian's immortality was to begin when their body was translated like Enoch's); and finally, Eusebius spoke of God figuratively translating Christians at the end of the age in his *preparatio evangelica*.7.8.²¹

The word *analambano* (to take up into heaven) is used: in reference to Jesus' ascension by Justin Martyr (d. 165), Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373) and Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita (5th cent.); in reference to Elijah's ascension by Clement of Alexandria (d. 215), Origen (d. 254), Methodius and Athanasius again; in reference to John the Apostle's ascension by Hippolytus Thebanus (8th cent.); in reference to the ascension of the souls of Christians by Justin Martyr, Methodius, and Palladius

²⁰G. W. H. Lampe, ed. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 536.

²¹G. W. H. Lampe, ed. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, vol. 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 862, par. B2.

Monachus (d. 431); and in reference to the ascension of Paul by Palladius Monachus again.²²

The word *anabaino* (to ascend or rise up to heaven) is used in reference to the ascension, ascending to the cross, and the transfiguration. This word is also used to speak of ascending from the earthly sphere to the heavenly sphere by Clement of Alexandria in his *stromateis.4.1*, Origen in his *Contra Celsum.3.47, 6.6, and 7.46*, referring to Romans 1:20, and Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in his *de divinis moninibus.5.7*.²³

The word *ekpheugo* is used to mean escape, especially avoidance of eternal punishment, by Ignatius of Antioch (d. 110) in his *Epistle of Trallianeos.2.1* and Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho.138.3* and *First Apology.68.2*.²⁴ *Apostasia* is used as meaning departure by the apocryphal apocalyptic book of *Domitio Mariae*. *Apostasis* is used to mean departure by Clement of Alexandria in his *stromateis.4.22*.²⁵ The Greek words relating to rapture not used at all by the Fathers are: *epairo*, *poreuomai*, *allasso*, and *sozo*.

As can be seen from the above citations, the Fathers had an understanding of the concept of rapture, referred to the Old Testament raptures of Enoch and Elijah and the New Testament raptures of Paul, John, and Jesus, and even made eight specific references to the rapture of Christians (four of which could be construed as referring to

²²Lampe, 1:109.

²³Lampe, 1:94-95.

²⁴Lampe, 2:442.

²⁵Lampe, 1:208.

the Rapture of the Church). Next, a brief word must be said about the Fathers' use of the Greek word *parousia*, as compared to *erchomai*, in relation to the Rapture, Second Coming, or both.

Uses of *Parousia* versus *Erchomai* by the Fathers

The word *erchomai* is used very infrequently by the Fathers (only six citations) to represent “coming or advent.” Of these, two refer to John the Baptist asking Jesus if he is the Messiah in Matthew 11; one exegetes the phrase “thy kingdom come” from the Lord’s Prayer; and the other three address the phrase “coming to judge the quick and the dead” in the Creeds.²⁶ In contrast, *epiphaneia*, is used five different ways by the Fathers, including both Jesus’ first and second comings. The citations regarding the Second Coming are seventeen in number and break down into six categories: (1) in general; (2) in prophecy; (3) contrasted to the First Coming, with special reference to the Feast of Christ’s Baptism; (4) as inspiring fear; (5) being prepared by practice of virtue; and (6) in reference to millenarianism of followers.²⁷ The word *phaneroo* is also used by the Fathers, but again in a very limited way eschatologically (by Clement in his *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 50.3 and *Shepherd of Hermas* 4.2.2—both referring to the Church.)²⁸

The word *parousia*, on the other hand, has voluminous uses by the Fathers. It is used to communicate: (1) presence in general, seven times; (2) the universal presence of

²⁶Lampe, 2:550.

²⁷Lampe, 2:538-9.

²⁸G. W. H. Lampe, ed. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, vol. 5 (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 1470.

Logos, six times; (3) presence of the Holy Ghost, three times; (4) arrival, appearance, personal visit or advent in general, nine times; (5) of entry into corporeal life of pre-existent souls, three times; (6) of Jesus' First Advent (Incarnation), twenty-five times; (7) as a coming judgment by Chrysostom in his *Homily 28.1 in John*; (8) in both the first and second advents, five times; (9) in the future (second) advent, twenty-five times; (10) the advent of Christ's kingdom, foretold by the prophets, one time; (11) of the advent of the Holy Ghost, four times; and (12) of the advent of antichrist, one time.²⁹ Of the citations dealing with the "future advent of Christ," some seem to deal with the Rapture, some seem to deal with the Second Coming, and some could be either/or.

From these many varied uses of *parousia* by the Fathers it is clear that it was not a term specifically reserved for use in conjunction with the Rapture, as Paul chose to use it. It appears to be an all inclusive term to represent all the events surrounding the Second Coming (Advent) of the Lord Jesus Christ (including the Rapture of the Church). This was also the conclusion of both James F. Stitzinger, in his article, "The Rapture in Twenty Centuries of Biblical Interpretation" and Gerald B. Stanton, in his book, *Kept From the Hour*.³⁰ Next, the direct references to the Rapture of the Church by the Fathers will be addressed.

²⁹G. W. H. Lampe, ed. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, vol. 4 (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 1043-4.

³⁰Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept From the Hour* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956); quoted in James F. Stitzinger, "The Rapture in Twenty Centuries of Biblical Interpretation" *The Master's Seminary Journal* 13 (2002), 151, n. 10.

Direct References to the Rapture by the Fathers

The first direct reference to the Rapture (as the Church escaping the Great Tribulation) is found in the early second century apocalyptic writing of the *Shepherd of Hermas*. In the fourth vision, chapter 1, he says, [emphasis added] “I saw another vision, brethren—a representation of the *tribulation that is to come*.” Then in chapter 2, he says, “lo! a *virgin* meets me, adorned as if she were proceeding from the bridal chamber” and “I knew from my former visions that *this was the Church*,” and then, “You have *escaped from great tribulation* on account of your faith, and because you did not doubt in the presence of such a beast. Go, therefore, and *tell the elect* of the Lord His mighty deeds, and say to them that this beast is a type of the *great tribulation that is coming*. If then ye prepare yourselves, and repent with all your heart, and turn to the Lord, *it will be possible for you to escape it*, if your heart be pure and spotless, and ye spend the rest of the days of your life in the serving the Lord blamelessly.”³¹ Notice also, the statement that to escape the tribulation the Church must keep a “pure and spotless” heart. This is the same language used in 2 Peter 3:14, speaking of the Rapture of the Church.

The next reference is found in *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (The Didache)*, written in the mid-second century, and with the help of the footnotes paints a clear picture of the chronology of events of the End Times (Rapture, Antichrist, Tribulation, Second Coming). In chapter 16, verses 3-8, it says [emphasis added],

For in the *last days* false prophets and corrupters shall be multiplied, and the sheep shall be turned into wolves, and love shall be turned into hate; for when lawlessness increaseth, they shall hate and persecute and betray one another, and *then shall appear the world-deceiver as Son of God*, and shall do signs and

³¹*The Shepherd of Hermas* 4.1-2 (ANF 2:17-18).

wonders, and *the earth shall be delivered into his hands*, and he shall do iniquitous things which have never yet come to pass since the beginning. Then *shall the creation of men come into the fire of trial*, and many shall be made to stumble and shall perish; *but they that endure in their faith shall be saved from under the curse itself*. And then shall appear the signs of the truth; first the sign of an outspreading of heaven; then the sign of the sound of the trumpet; and the third, the resurrection of the dead; yet not of all, but as it is said: *The Lord shall come and all his saints with Him. Then shall the world see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven.*³²

Notice, the context is the Last Days and the quote starts out with the signs of the times, coinciding with Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. Next, the appearance of the antichrist and the Tribulation are addressed. Then, there comes the exclusionary “but,” they that endure in their faith shall be saved from under the curse itself. The footnote in the text after this statement says, “from under the curse itself; namely, that which has just been described.”³³ This is a direct reference to the Church being saved from the Tribulation.

After this is established and as an explanatory note of the specifics (similar to 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), three “signs of the truth” are given: (1) the outspreading of heaven (of which the footnote says, “Professor Hall now prefers to render *ekpetaseos*, ‘outspreading,’ instead of ‘unrolling’ as in his version originally. Hitchcock and Brown, Schaff, and others, prefer, ‘opening;’ that is, the apparent opening in heaven through which the Lord will descend . . . Bryennios and Farrar refer it to *the flying forth of the saints to meet the Lord* [emphasis added]”);³⁴ (2) the sound of the trumpet; and (3) the

³²*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 16.3-8 (ANF 7:382).

³³*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 16, n. 14 (ANF 7:382).

³⁴*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 16, n. 16 (ANF 7:382).

resurrection of the dead; “yet not all, but as it is said: The Lord shall come and all His saints with Him” (the footnote says, “Zech 14:5 . . . As here used, it seems to point to the first resurrection. Compare 1 Thess 4:15; 1 Cor 15:23; Rev 20:5. *Probably it is based upon the Pauline eschatology rather than that of the Apocalypse* [emphasis added]”).³⁵ And finally, “Then shall the world see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven” (Matt 24:30). Therefore, processing all this information from the text and the footnotes and from the order presented by the text, this citation appears to be a direct reference to the Rapture of the Church, as outlined by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4; preceding the Antichrist and the Tribulation and then, the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus.

The next direct references to the Rapture are contained in Irenaeus’ (120-202), *Against Heresies*, Book 5. There, he uses Enoch as an example of the Rapture of the just/Church, clearly states the Rapture occurs before the Tribulation, and separates the Rapture from the Second Coming and Resurrection of the Just. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp (who was a disciple of John the Apostle), was the first to detail prophetic events after the writing of the New Testament, and gave the Church the first system of premillennial interpretation.³⁶

The first citation was previously mentioned in the “Uses of *Harpazo*” section and comes from chapter 5, section 1, “For Enoch, when he pleased God, was translated in the same body in which he did please Him, thus *pointing out by anticipation the translation*

³⁵*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 16, n. 17 (ANF 7:382).

³⁶Ladd, *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God*, 25-26.

of the just [emphasis added].”³⁷ Next, in chapter 29, at the end of section 1, “And therefore, when in the end the *Church shall be suddenly caught up from this*, it is said, ‘There shall be *tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, neither shall be*’ [emphasis added]. For this is the last contest of the righteous, in which, when they overcome, they are crowned with incorruption.”³⁸ The “this” mentioned in the text, that the Church is caught up from, is clearly the “Tribulation.” Then, Irenaeus continues on in section 2 of chapter 29 and sections 1-3 of chapter 30 to talk about the Beast and Antichrist. And at the end of section 4 of chapter 30, he concludes with the Second Coming, “sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire; but bringing in for the righteous the times of the kingdom, that is the rest, the hallowed seventh day.”³⁹

This chronological order of events is carefully and logically stated by Irenaeus to be: the Rapture, followed by the Antichrist and Tribulation, followed by the Second Coming. He then confirms this same chronological order by addressing the order of the various resurrections in chapter 31, section 2, followed by chapter 32, section 1. First, [emphasis added] “As our Master, therefore, did not at once depart, taking flight [to heaven], but awaited the time of His resurrection prescribed by the Father, which had been also shown forth through Jonas, and rising again after three days was *taken up* [to heaven], so ought we also to *await the time of our resurrection* prescribed by God and

³⁷Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.5.1 (ANF 1:530).

³⁸Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.29.1 (ANF 1:558).

³⁹Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.30.4 (ANF 1:560).

foretold by the prophets, and so, *rising be taken up, as many as the Lord shall account worthy of this [privilege].*⁴⁰ This relates the resurrection of those in Christ and Rapture of the Church (1 Thess 4:15-17) to Jesus' Ascension (Acts 1:1-11). Then, comes the first and second resurrections described by Matthew 25 and Revelation 20 that are specifically tied to the Second Coming of Jesus, “. . . they are both ignorant of God's dispensations, and of the mystery of the resurrection of the just, and of the [earthly] kingdom which is the commencement of incorruption . . . that it behooves *the righteous first to receive the promise of the inheritance* which God promised to the fathers, and to reign in it, when they rise again to behold God in this creation which is renovated, and that the *judgment should take place afterwards* [emphasis added].”⁴¹

The final direct references to the Rapture of the Church are found in Victorinus' (d. 303/304) *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. From 6:14, “. . . and the heaven withdrew as a scroll that is rolled up]. For the heaven to be rolled away, this is that the *Church shall be taken away* [emphasis added].”⁴² And from 15:1, “. . . and I saw another great and wonderful sign, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is completed the indignation of God.] For the *wrath of God* always strikes the obstinate people with seven plagues, that is, perfectly, as it is said in Leviticus; and these *shall be in the last time, when the Church shall have gone out of the midst* [emphasis added].”⁴³

⁴⁰Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.31.2 (ANF 1:560-1).

⁴¹Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.32.1 (ANF 1:561).

⁴²Victorinus, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* 6.14 (ANF 7:351).

⁴³Victorinus, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* 15.1 (ANF 7:357).

These citations, taken primarily from the first two centuries of the Church, are clear that the Rapture of the Church shall take place before the Tribulation and at a time separate from the Second Coming of the Lord, thus fulfilling criteria (1) and (2) from Bell's list. And in one of the citations of Irenaeus, the resurrection of the just is addressed as being in two separate stages, fulfilling Bell's criterion number (3) also. The indirect references or inferences of the Rapture will be explored next.

Indirect References to the Rapture by the Fathers

Clement of Rome (30-100) spoke about the Rapture in his *First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Following the logical flow of his teaching from chapter to chapter yields the result of a Pretribulation Rapture of the Church. As Irenaeus did, Clement first gives Enoch as an example and then mentions the Lord delivering Noah (chap. 9). He also mentions the Lord saving Lot (chap. 11) and Rahab (chap. 12). Then, he speaks specifically to the Church in chapter 23, [emphasis added] “Compare yourselves to a tree: take [for instance] the vine. First of all, it sheds its leaves, then it buds, next it puts forth leaves, and then it flowers; after that comes the sour grape, and then follows the ripened fruit. . . . Of a truth, soon and suddenly shall His will be accomplished, as the Scripture also bears witness, saying, ‘*Speedily will He come, and will not tarry;*’ and, ‘*The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Holy One, for whom ye look.*’”⁴⁴ And following directly after this in chapter 24 [emphasis added], “Let us consider, beloved, how the Lord continually proves to us that there shall be a *future resurrection*, of which

⁴⁴Clement of Rome, *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 23 (ANF 1:11).

He has rendered the *Lord Jesus Christ the first-fruits by raising Him from the dead.*⁴⁵

Putting these two quotes together with the previous examples of the Lord delivering the righteous ones (Enoch, Noah, Lot, and Rahab), and interpreting “His temple” to mean, “His Body” (Church) from his reference to “first-fruits” (1 Cor 15:20-23), speaks to the Rapture of the Church. This is confirmed in chapters 34 and 35 by Clement addressing the rewards for those “who may be made partakers of His great and glorious promises”⁴⁶ and “Let us therefore strive to be found in the number of *those that wait for Him*, [emphasis added] in order that we may share in His promised gifts.”⁴⁷ This logical process of thought by Clement is further expounded upon in the article by Michael G. Mickey, “The Pre-Tribulation Rapture: A new idea?”⁴⁸

The next inference is contained in Polycarp’s (65-155) *Epistle to the Philippians*, where he connects the resurrection of Christians (in conjunction with the Rapture) directly to the “judgment seat of Christ” (occurring in heaven during the Tribulation). Polycarp was the direct disciple of John the Apostle. In chapter 2 he says, “He comes as the Judge of the living and the dead. His blood will God require of those who do not believe in Him. *But He who raised Him up from the dead will raise up us also*, [emphasis added] if we do His will, and walk in His commandments, and love what He loved.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵Clement of Rome, *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 24 (ANF 1:11).

⁴⁶Clement of Rome, *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, 34 (ANF 1:14).

⁴⁷Clement of Rome, *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, 35 (ANF 1:14).

⁴⁸Michael G. Mickey, “The Pre-Tribulation Rapture: A New Idea?” 2004, <http://www.rapturealert.com/pretribnewidea.html> (6 September 2005).

⁴⁹Polycarp, *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* 2 (ANF 1:33).

The exclusionary “But” separates the phrase about the resurrection (which occurs in conjunction with the Rapture) from the phrase about the judgment. Again in chapter 5 Polycarp continues, “If we please Him in this present world, we shall receive also the future world, *according as He has promised to us that He will raise us again from the dead* [emphasis added], and that if we live worthily of Him, ‘we shall also reign together with Him.’”⁵⁰ This talks of a separate resurrection just for Christians, and is followed by the purpose of this resurrection in chapter 6, “and ‘we must all appear at the judgment-seat of Christ, and must every one give and account of himself.’”⁵¹ The Judgment Seat of Christ (or *bema* in Greek) is a separate judgment just for Christians (for rewards or lack thereof). It is conducted in heaven after the Rapture, during the Tribulation of earth, and before the Judgment of the Nations in Matthew 25 and the first resurrection, after the Second Coming.⁵²

This is followed by *The Epistle of Barnabas* (100), which refers to the writings of Enoch about the End Times and places the resurrection of the Church before the “retribution.” It states [emphasis added], “For this end the Lord has *cut short* the times and the days, that *His Beloved may hasten*; and *He will come to the inheritance*,”⁵³ and “the *Church* being the *spiritual temple of God*,”⁵⁴ (similar to the description by Clement).

⁵⁰Polycarp, *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* 5 (ANF 1:34).

⁵¹Polycarp, *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians* 6 (ANF 1:34).

⁵²Pentecost, 219-226; and Geisler, 612, 618.

⁵³*The Epistle of Barnabas* 4 (ANF 1:138).

⁵⁴*The Epistle of Barnabas* 16 (ANF 1:147).

And in conclusion [emphasis added], “It is well, therefore, that he who has learned the judgments of the Lord, as many as have been written, should walk in them. For he who keepeth these shall be *glorified in the kingdom of God*; but he who chooseth other things shall be destroyed with his works. *On this account there will be a resurrection*, on this account a retribution.”⁵⁵ Notice the order: resurrection first (in conjunction with the Rapture) and then retribution (either from the Tribulation or the Judgment).

The next inference is made by Tertullian (145-220) in his *A Treatise on the Soul*. In chapter 55, speaking of the soul of a Christian after death not going to heaven before the resurrection of Christians at the Rapture of the Church, he says, “How, indeed, shall the soul mount up to heaven, where Christ is already sitting at the Father’s right hand, when as yet the archangel’s trumpet has not been heard by the command of God-when as yet those whom the coming of the Lord is to find on the earth, have not been caught up into the air to meet Him at His coming, in company with the dead in Christ, who shall be the first to arise?”⁵⁶ This is a clear reference to the Rapture, but it is not placed within the End Time sequence of events.

The next inference is contained in the *Treatises of Cyprian* (200-258), where he speaks of the dead in Christ, the Rapture of the Church, Enoch being an example for the Church, and the Rapture as deliverance from the Tribulation to come. Cyprian was the disciple of Tertullian. In Treatise VII, chapter 21, he sets the tone for the successive five chapters by quoting 1 Thessalonians 4:13, “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose

⁵⁵*The Epistle of Barnabas* 21 (ANF 1:149).

⁵⁶Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul* 50 (ANF 3:231).

again, even so them which are asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.”⁵⁷ Then in chapter 22, there is a direct reference to the Rapture:

“ . . . since Paul the apostle announces and says, ‘For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change the body of our humiliation and conform it to the body of His glory?’ Christ the Lord also promises that we shall be such, when, that we may be with Him . . . he prays to the Father for us, saying, ‘Father, I will that they also whom Thou has given me be with me where I am’ . . . He who is to attain the throne of Christ . . . in accordance with the Lord’s promise, in accordance with his faith in the truth, to rejoice in *this his departure and translation* [emphasis added].”⁵⁸

In the following chapter, Cyprian mentions why Enoch was translated as an example for the Church, “To have been pleasing in the sight of God was thus to have merited to be *translated from the contagion of the world* [emphasis added]. And moreover, also, the Holy Spirit teaches by Solomon, that they who please God are more early taken hence, and are more quickly set free, lest while they are delaying longer in this world they should be polluted with the contagions of the world.”⁵⁹ Then, he weaves in the timing of the Rapture in chapter 25 [emphasis added], “that terrible things have begun, and know that still *more terrible things are imminent*, may regard it as the greatest advantage *to depart from it as quickly as possible . . . that by an earlier departure you are taken away, and delivered from the shipwrecks and disasters that are imminent?*”⁶⁰

The final inference to the Rapture of the Church is contained in the *Works of St. Chrysostom* (347-407), *Homilies on Ephesians* and *Homilies on Thessalonians*. In

⁵⁷Cyprian, *Treatises of Cyprian* 7.21 (ANF 5:474).

⁵⁸Cyprian, *Treatises of Cyprian* 7.22 (ANF 5:474).

⁵⁹Cyprian, *Treatises of Cyprian* 7.23 (ANF 5:474-5).

⁶⁰Cyprian, *Treatises of Cyprian* 7.25 (ANF 5:475).

Homily III on Ephesians, he clearly speaks of the Rapture, using both 1 Thessalonians 4:15 and 1 Corinthians 15:52, but does not place it within the End Time sequence of events. Later in the same Homily, he speaks of raising up the Church to the throne of God, “for where the Head is, there is the body also. There is no interval to separate between the Head and the body; for were there a separation, then were it no longer a body, then were it no longer a head.”⁶¹ From this statement it appears that the “spiritual” Rapture occurred with Jesus’ Ascension and the “physical” Rapture will take place in the future at the end of the Church Age. This logic appears to be confirmed by a statement later in his Homily VIII in Thessalonians, “If He is about to descend, on what account shall we be caught up? For the sake of honor . . . For He received Him up in the clouds, and ‘we shall be caught up in the clouds.’ (Acts 1:9) Seest thou how great is the honor? And as He descends, we go forth to meet Him and, what is more blessed than all, so we shall be with Him.”⁶² Again, there is no mention of timing in the End Times chronology. Yet, he goes on to make reference to the state of the souls “left behind,” who have seen others taken up and likens it to the fate of those “left behind” in the days of Noah.⁶³

Later in Homily III in Second Thessalonians, he mentions the Rapture again, in light of chapter 2, verses 1 and 2, saying, “Here he is discoursing concerning the resurrection and our gathering together. For these things will happen at the same time.” He then treats the confusion about the Day of the Lord as a subsequent matter in verses 3

⁶¹Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 3 (NPNF 13:61-62).

⁶²Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Thessalonians* 8 (NPNF 13:356).

⁶³Chrysostom, *Homilies on First Thessalonians* 8 (NPNF 13:356-7).

and 4 (just as Paul did), by saying, “Here he discourses concerning the Antichrist and reveals great mysteries. What is the falling away? He calls him Apostasy . . . And he calls him ‘the man of sin.’”⁶⁴ From the way in which he treats these subjects, it appears that he is agreeing with Paul that the Rapture occurs first, then comes the appearance of the antichrist.

The above inferences all seem to confirm that even more of the Fathers understood Paul’s teaching on the Rapture of the Church and most inferred, if not directly stated, that it would occur before the Tribulation or the appearance of the Antichrist. Combining these inferences with the direct references, outlined by the previous section, lends much credence to the statement: the Early Church Fathers, especially of the first two centuries, believed in the imminent, pretribulational Return of Christ for His Church and taught it accordingly in their writings. Before moving on to the post-Nicene Church, two citations found by the author that seem to place the Rapture at the end of the Tribulation and/or in conjunction with Jesus’ Second Coming must be addressed.

References to the Posttribulational Rapture by the Fathers

As seen above, the majority of the citations directly or indirectly referring to the Rapture of the Church allude to its timing as being pretribulational. However, in searching the Fathers’ writings for Rapture citations, the author came across the following two citations which mention the Rapture in a posttribulational light. The first was written by Hippolytus (170-236), disciple of Irenaeus, in the late second to early third century; the second was written in the mid to late fourth century by Cyril (318-387).

⁶⁴Chrysostom, *Homilies on Second Thessalonians* 3 (NPNF 13:386).

Hippolytus in his *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, in sections 60, 61, 64, and 66 states that the Woman seen by John in Revelation 12 is the Church and she will go through the Great Tribulation. She “flees from city to city, and seeks concealment in the wilderness among the mountains” during the Great Tribulation. After all the judgments and wrath in Revelation are completed, and with “the whole world finally approaching the consummation, what remains but the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?” And with that, the “resurrection of the righteous, Paul also speaks thus in writing Thessalonians” (the Rapture) occurs at the end of the Tribulation, in conjunction with the Second Coming of Jesus.⁶⁵

Cyril, in Lecture XV of his *Catechetical Lectures* (Lectures VI-XVIII cover the Apostles’ Creed), addresses the two comings of Christ in sections 1 and 2. He then focuses on the Second Coming and the signs leading up to it in sections 3-8. In section 9, he speaks of the “hatred of the brethren” as being the “falling away” mentioned by Paul; thus, making room for the Antichrist. In section 19, the Rapture is mentioned as coincidental with the Second Coming, “But let us wait and look for the Lord’s coming upon the clouds of heaven. Then shall Angelic trumpets sound; the dead in Christ shall rise first—the godly persons who are alive shall be caught up in the clouds . . .”⁶⁶

From these two isolated citations, occurring later in the Early Church Period than most of the other citations outlining a pretribulation Rapture, it may be concluded that although a premillennial, imminent Return of Christ was still being taught, that some of

⁶⁵Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* 60, 61, 64, 66 (ANF 5:217-219).

⁶⁶Cyril, *The Catechetical Lectures of S. Cyril* 15.19 (NPNF 7:110).

the Fathers were beginning to be affected by Origen's (185-254) neo-Platonic, allegorical, interpretative philosophy. This philosophical way of thinking spawned speculative teachings on his part (for example: pre-existence of the human soul, *apokatastais* [restoration of all things], and subordinationism). These teachings later led to the heretical beliefs of Universalism (the belief that all of creation will ultimately be saved, possibly even including Satan himself) and Arianism (that Jesus was not co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, but was created as a "second God," subordinate to the Father).⁶⁷ Origen was also the first to teach Amillennialism as a belief. As mentioned above, Amillennialism became the prevailing eschatological doctrine of the Church during the time of Augustine (354-430). So, with Origen's influence on both these Fathers, it is reasonable to assume that they would begin the shift to a posttribulation Rapture in conjunction with the Second Coming of Christ. This leads into the next section, which addresses the question of whether the belief of the Fathers in the pretribulation Rapture of the Church was passed on to subsequent Church Ages? If so, one would expect to find at least isolated references to the subject throughout these periods.

Review of Writings from the Post-Nicene Church up to 1750

First, the orthodox Creeds of the Church (Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian) will be reviewed. Some form of the Apostles' Creed is the oldest. But, the first record of it in its entirety was recorded in Greek by Marcellus between 336-341, and in Latin by

⁶⁷David W. Dorries, *Our Christian Roots*, vol. 1 (Coweta, OK: Kairos Ministries International, 2002), 26.

Rufinus in 390. The form Christendom currently uses was received from the late seventh and early eighth century. The Nicene Creed has three different forms: (1) The original from the Ecumenical Council at Nicea in 325; (2) The enlarged Creed from the Council at Constantinople in 381; and (3) The Latin version with various dates—589, 809, 858. When the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds are compared side by side, they both contain the exact same language in lines 7, 11 and 12, “7. And he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end” . . . “11. And we look for the resurrection of the dead; 12. And the life of the world to come.”⁶⁸ These Creeds clearly mention two separate statements; one referring the Second Coming of Christ to “judge the quick and the dead,” and the other speaking of the “resurrection of the body and life everlasting.” Since they contain two separate statements, a case can be made that these two events happen at different times (the same as the Rapture and the Second Coming).

However, the Athanasian Creed, which probably was not written by Athanasius and did not appear in its full form until the end of the eighth/beginning of the ninth century, consolidates the separate thoughts of the previous creeds into one universal resurrection and judgment event occurring at the Second Coming in its lines 40-44: “40. From whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. 41. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies; 42. And shall give account for their own works. 43. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done

⁶⁸Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes* vol. 1, *The History of Creeds* (New York: Harper and Row, 1931; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 21-28.

evil, into everlasting fire. 44. This is the Catholic Faith: which except a man believe faithfully, he can not be saved.”⁶⁹ This makes sense, since the Athanasian Creed dates well after the previous two Creeds, came out of the N. African School of Augustine and dates after Amillennialism became the eschatological doctrine of the newly consolidated Catholic Church. The other references/inferences to the Rapture in Church History will now be addressed.

The next citation was discovered by Grant R. Jeffrey during the summer of 1994 in manuscripts apparently written by Ephraem the Syrian (306-373) and entitled, *Sermon On the Last Times, the Antichrist, and the End of the World*.⁷⁰ However, since its recent discovery it has been determined that several prominent ancient Byzantine scholars (Ernest Sakur, 1862-1901, Wilhelm Bousset, 1865-1920, C. P. Caspari, in his 1890 book, and the late Paul J. Alexander) had already reviewed the manuscript and determined it to be written by a Pseudo-Ephraem, dating anywhere from 373 to somewhere between 565 and 627.⁷¹ In either case, the quotation from the text speaks for itself [emphasis added]:

1. Most dearly beloved brothers, believe the Holy Spirit who speaks in us. Now we have spoken before, because the end of the world is very near, and the consummation remains . . .
2. We ought to understand thoroughly therefore, my brothers, *what is imminent or overhanging* . . . Why therefore do we not reject every care of earthly actions

⁶⁹Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes* vol. 2, *The Greek and Latin Creeds* (New York: Harper and Row, 1931; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 36-9, 69-70.

⁷⁰Grant R. Jeffrey, “A Pretrib Rapture Statement in the Early Medieval Church,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 108, 115.

⁷¹Timothy J. Demy and Thomas D. Ice, “The Rapture and an Early Medieval Citation,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (1995): 310-12.

and *prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Christ, so that He may draw us from the confusion, which overwhelms the world?* Believe you me, dearest brothers, because the coming of the Lord is nigh, . . . because the end of the world is at hand, . . . because it is the very last time . . . See to it that this sentence be not fulfilled among you of the prophet who declares: ‘Woe to those who desire to see the Day of the Lord!’ *Because all saints and the Elect of the Lord are gathered together before the tribulation which is about to come and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins.* . . . it is the eleventh hour, and the end of this world comes to the harvest.⁷²

It is clear that this citation describes a pretribulation Rapture of the Church. If one uses the later dating of this manuscript (AD 565-627), then this would be the first reference to support the Rapture in the Medieval Church (post-AD 500). This would also show a connection to the teaching of the Early Church Fathers.

The *Codex Amiatinus* (ca. 690-716) is a Latin manuscript from England which was written under the auspices of Abbot Ceolfrid from the monasteries at Jarrow and Wearmouth. This manuscript was written during the same time period as the commentaries of Venerable Bede (who was also a monk at Jarrow monastery). In the *Codex Amiatinus*, in the title to Psalm 22 a note was written, “Psalm of David, the voice of *the Church after being raptured* [emphasis added].”⁷³ While this is just an isolated statement in an isolated manuscript amid the sea of Augustine’s amillennial eschatology, it still shows the continuity of the belief in the Rapture of the Church during the Medieval Church Period.

The next citation is from the early fourteenth century, after Joachim of Fiore (1130-1202), a monk from Italy, had revived interest in the premillennial belief through

⁷²Jeffrey, 109-111.

⁷³Stitzinger, 158.

his new prophetic interpretation of eschatology—Three ages/dispensations: (1) the Father (or Law), from Creation to the Incarnation; (2) the Son (or Grace), from Jesus’ First Advent to His Second Advent (at the year AD 1260); and (3) the Holy Spirit (or the Spiritual Church/Millennium).⁷⁴ The citation is taken from *The History of Brother Dolcino*, written in 1316 by an anonymous notary in the diocese of Vercelli, Italy. It speaks of the beliefs of Brother Dolcino of Novara (d. 1307), who was a member, and ultimately became the leader, of a group called the Apostolic Brethren (founded by Gerard Sagarello in 1260 after the Franciscans rejected him for membership). The citation is as follows [emphasis added]:

Again [Dolcino believed and preached and taught] that within those three years Dolcino himself and his followers will preach the coming of the Antichrist. And that the Antichrist was coming into this world within the bounds of the said three and a half years; and *after he had come, then he [Dolcino] and his followers would be transferred into Paradise, in which are Enoch and Elijah*. And in this way they will be *preserved unharmed from the persecution of the Antichrist*. And that then Enoch and Elijah themselves would descend on the earth for the purpose of preaching [against] Antichrist. Then they would be killed . . .⁷⁵

Both Joachim of Fiore and Brother Dolcino turned the Medieval Church in a direction back toward the premillennial eschatology of the Fathers. And from that time on, there followed more interest and study on these eschatological issues.

Even though the tide of eschatology had begun to turn back to premillennialism, it took awhile before Protestants began to more readily address the Pretribulation Rapture. Although John Calvin (1509-1564) did address the imminence of the Rapture in general

⁷⁴Froom, 683, 692-6.

⁷⁵Francis Gumerlock, “A Rapture Citation in the Fourteenth Century,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (2002): 353-55.

terms, he did not address the timing of it.⁷⁶ Joseph Mede (the father of English premillennialism), helped the process immensely by writing his strongly premillennial book *Clavis Apocalyptica* (“Key of the Revelation”) in 1627.⁷⁷ After that, Increase Mather (1639-1723) wrote, “the saints would be caught up into the air beforehand, thereby escaping the final conflagration.” Peter Jurieu (1637-1713), prominent theologian and apologist in the French Reformed Church, in his work *Approaching Deliverance of the Church* (1687) taught, “Christ would come in the air to rapture the saints and return to heaven before the battle of Armageddon.”⁷⁸

In the eighteenth century, John Gill (1697-1771), scholar and Calvinist theologian, published his work *An Exposition of the New Testament* in three volumes from 1746 to 1748. His commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:15 states, “The Apostle having something new and extraordinary to deliver, concerning the coming of Christ, the first resurrection, of the resurrection of the saints, the change of the living saints, and the rapture both of the raised, and living in the clouds to meet Christ in the air, expresses itself in this manner.” Regarding 1 Thessalonians 4:17, he amplifies:

Suddenly, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and with force and power; by the power of Christ, and by the ministry and means of the holy angels; and to which rapture will contribute the agility, which the bodies both of the raised and changed saints will have; and the rapture of the living saints will be together with them; with the dead in Christ, that will then be raised; so that the one will not prevent the other, or the one be sooner with Christ than the other; but one being raised and the other changed, they’ll be joined in one company and general

⁷⁶Geisler, 658-9.

⁷⁷Stitzinger, 161.

⁷⁸Stitzinger, 162.

assembly, and be rapt up together: in the clouds; the same clouds perhaps in which Christ will come, will be let down to take them up.

Similar pretribulational views are also found in commentaries by Philip Doddridge (1702-1751), James MacKnight (1721-1800), and Thomas Scott (1747-1821).⁷⁹ Finally, Morgan Edwards (1722-1795), Baptist preacher and founder of Brown University (then called Rhode Island College), wrote an essay on Bible Prophecy entitled, “Two Academical Exercises on Subjects Bearing the following Titles; Millennium, Last-Novelties,” during his student days at Bristol Baptist Seminary (1742-44). In this essay, Edwards makes the statement, “The distance between the first and second resurrection will be somewhat more than a thousand years.” After researching the context of the text, Thomas Ice, in his “Morgan Edwards: Another Pre-Darby Rapturist,” from *The Thomas Ice Collection*, concluded that Edwards believed that: (1) 1,003.5 years would transpire between resurrections; (2) He associated the first resurrection with the Rapture of 1 Thessalonians 4:17, at least 3.5 years before the Millennium; (3) He associated the meeting of believers with Christ in the air with John 14:2; and (4) He saw believers disappearing during the tribulation.⁸⁰ From these citations throughout Church History it may be ascertained that at least a trickle of the Fathers flood of premillennial pretribulational Rapture teaching was maintained up to the time of Irving, MacDonald, and Darby. In the next chapter, the evidence presented by this thesis will be weighed against the claims of those theologians who say that the doctrine of the Rapture was a novel and non-orthodox idea that burst onto the eschatological scene around the year 1830.

⁷⁹Stitzinger, 162-3.

⁸⁰Stitzinger, 163.

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY, EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Summary

This thesis began by outlining the problem of trying to establish when the doctrine of the pretribulation Rapture of the Church began: in the Early Church as a logical follow-on to the teachings of Paul and the Apostles or around 1830, with the rise of Dispensationalism. There are many modern-day theologians on both sides of the issue. Interestingly enough, both sides agree that Paul taught about the Rapture of the Church in the Scriptures; however, the disagreement comes as to when the Rapture will occur (the primary arguments are pretribulational or posttribulational, with midtribulational being a distant third). Yet, the answer comes down to finding the necessary historical evidence to support either position. Either the Early Church Fathers were taught this doctrine by the Apostles and subsequently passed it down in their writings, or they had no idea of this teaching and thus were silent because the Rapture was not a separate event from the Second Coming.

This question led to the methodology used by the author. After researching both sides of the issue, including the research of four previous authors, this thesis was designed to describe the overall problem, background (including the summarized results of the four previous authors), presuppositions of the author and definition of key terms (chapter 1). Then, an exegetical study of the “Rapture Passages” was conducted to

ascertain their validity (chapter 2). This led to a review of the Ante-Nicene, Post-Nicene, and Medieval writings to explore the possibility of this belief being passed down by the Fathers, using the evaluative criteria established by Bell (chapter 3). The results of this research will now be summarized and evaluated. The research of the previous authors will be addressed first to lay the foundation for evaluating the findings of chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis. Then, the findings of chapters 2 and 3 will be compared to the previous authors' findings on the subject, and a conclusion will be drawn.

Rea's thesis was on the chronological relation of the Rapture of the Church to the Great Tribulation. And, although it contained a wealth of information that contributed to the definition of terms in chapter 1 and the exegetical study in chapter 2, it contained very little historical information for use in chapter 3.¹ However, Carlsson's thesis, Hauser's dissertation and Bell's dissertation all address the subject from a historical perspective. Therefore, each of these will now be summarized on its own merits in the order written. Carlsson's "A Historical Approach to the Doctrine of the Rapture" broke down the historical witness into periods: Apostolic Fathers, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, the Middle Ages, the Reformation and post-Reformation Period, and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To this, he added two appendices: Imminency and Pretribulationism and Jewish Tradition and Pretribulationism. Under the overall summary of the thesis he concludes, "This study indicates that up to the nineteenth century, the consensus of opinion expressed in the various historical divisions made in this study . . . is that which is today known as the post-tribulation Rapture theory or historical

¹Rea, vi-viii.

premillennialism. Throughout these periods little direct mention is made to the Rapture, but tribulation and Antichrist are seen before the coming of Christ, which of course necessitates a post-tribulation Rapture.”² In appendix A, he adds, “The pre-tribulation Rapture cannot be defended from the early fathers by a defense of the doctrine of imminency of the Lord’s return.”³ However, appendix B ends on this note, “This material gives evidence that there is some connection between a Jewish tradition and the pre-tribulation Rapture position.”⁴ In total, there were several references to the Rapture, but very little evidence for a pretribulation Rapture.

Hauser, in his “The Eschatology of the Early Church Fathers,” treats the Patristic Fathers in three separate periods (96–150, 150–200, and 200–250); each addressing five different eschatological issues: the Great Tribulation, the Antichrist, the Second Advent, the Resurrection, and the Kingdom (notice there is no separate category for the Rapture). In his dissertation, Hauser reviewed the following writers, or writings, for evidence of their eschatological views on the five issues: Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Ignatius, Papias, Aristides, *Epistle to Diognetus*, *The Didache*, *An Ancient Homily*, *Epistle of Barnabas*, *Shepherd of Hermas*, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus of Antioch, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Origen. Even though it was not a primary focus of his research, his overall assessment of their collective view of a pretribulation Rapture was:

²Carlsson, 93b.

³Carlsson, 99.

⁴Carlsson, 101.

The Church Fathers believed that the Church would be on earth during the tribulation period. This is seen in the earliest writers and there is nothing in the other writers to contradict this. They speak of the persecution of the Church by the Antichrist and of the Church being on earth at the second advent of Christ. Two writers mention the translation of the Church but one, Irenaeus, does not tell when it will take place and the other, Origen, places it at the second advent of Christ. They did not seem to realize that part of the blessed hope of the Church was the escape from the wrath to come. The passages where the Apostles Paul and John teach this truth are neglected by these writers. Perhaps the extreme persecution which the Christians received during the first three centuries conditioned them to believe that they would go through the tribulation.⁵

Again, there are two isolated references to the Rapture, but just as passing comments that relate to the other eschatological findings. Despite Hauser's general pretribulation disposition, the Rapture was just not a primary focus of his research.

Bell, in his "A Critical Evaluation of the Pretribulation Rapture Doctrine in Christian Eschatology," does the most extensive historical and exegetical review of the pretribulation Rapture doctrine of all three authors, yet does not cover nearly as many early writings as Hauser did. He published the findings of his extensive research in the preface to his dissertation, which is summarized below:

No trace of the pretribulation rapture doctrine was found in the writings of the Ante-Nicene fathers.

No trace of dispensationalism was found in the writings of the Ante-Nicene fathers, which traces, had they been found, would have indicated at least an embryonic pretribulationism.

The historical origin of pretribulationism was traced to John Nelson Darby . . . The doctrine apparently arose about 1830.

A study of the specific New Testament data concerning the second coming of Christ confirmed the hypothesis that the doctrine was a product of theological deduction rather than inductive exegesis. It was found that the New Testament knows nothing of any future coming of Christ apart from His glorious, posttribulation coming which is so prominent in its pages . . .

⁵Hauser, 234.

It was concluded, then, that the pretribulation rapture position is not to be viewed as part of historic Christian orthodoxy.⁶

Since these findings are the most explicit, extensive, and germane, and quite aptly represent the views of the opponents of the pretribulation Rapture, they will be used as the standards upon which chapters 2 and 3 are evaluated (in addition to his four criteria previously stated and given again below for continuity's sake):

- (1) Any mention that Christ's second coming was to consist of more than one phase, separated by an interval of years.
- (2) Any mention that Christ was to remove the church from the earth before the tribulation period.
- (3) Any reference to the resurrection of the just as being in two stages.
- (4) Any indication that Israel and the church were to be clearly distinguished, thus providing some rationale for a removal of Christians before God "again deals with Israel."⁷

Evaluation

In evaluating chapter 2, Bell himself agrees (as do most posttribulationists) that the primary Rapture passages of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 are indeed explaining the Rapture of the Church. However, he believes that Paul is just expounding on what Jesus had previously taught in the Apocalyptic Discourse (Matt 24, Mark 13, Luke 21) about His own Second Coming, and that the Rapture would take place in conjunction with the Second Coming. Upon further exegetical exploration into these primary passages, with their associated passages, the following was determined.

The Rapture of the Church, as described in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15, is a completely separate and distinct event from the Second Coming of Christ, as

⁶Bell, ii-iii.

⁷Bell, 26-7.

described by Jesus in the Apocalyptic Discourse and in Revelation 19. The order of 1 Thessalonians 4 (addressing the Rapture) preceding 1 Thessalonians 5 (the Day of the Lord/Tribulation), is not just numerical in nature, but it also indicates the order of these two events chronologically. This is confirmed by Paul in the language of 5:3-8, where he indicates that the Christians will not be present for the Day of the Lord coming in “darkness” and “like a thief in the night.” This is further confirmed by verse 9, where he states that Christians are not destined for the wrath of God, but will experience His salvation instead. And by verse 10, where he reinforces the Rapture with the words, “whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him.”

Paul continues this line of thought in 2 Thessalonians 1:7. He clarifies that the unbelievers alone will receive “retribution” and “eternal destruction” at the Second Coming of the Lord in verses 7-10. Then in chapter 2, he begins with the “gathering together” of believers at the Rapture (completely separate from the Second Coming reference for judgment just related in chapter 1). He then proceeds to chronologically outline the order of events in verse 3: the apostasy/departure first (per the previous study of the word in chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis and Paul’s placement of the term here in chapter 2, it probably refers to the departure of the Church at the Rapture, mentioned in verse 1 of the same chapter); then the revealing of the Antichrist; and then the Day of the Lord. Then, the mention of the “restrainer” in verses 6 and 7, who is restraining the appearance of the antichrist. Referring back to the discussion in chapter 2 of this thesis and based on all the commentary reviewed, and again Paul’s placement in the text, leads one to believe the “restrainer” is the Church (relating back to verse 3, which in turn

relates back to verse 1—the Rapture of the Church). Then, verse 8 talks about the destruction of the Antichrist at the Second Coming of Christ. This is the second time the order is confirmed: restrainer raptured; Antichrist appears; and Antichrist destroyed at the Second Coming.

Whereas 1 Thessalonians 4 addresses the Rapture of both the resurrected dead in Christ and those Christians living at that time, 1 Corinthians 15 focuses on the resurrection aspect of the Rapture. Paul describes the change that takes place in the bodies of those who are asleep (or dead) in Christ at the time of the Rapture. As Rea states it in his thesis, “The resurrection of the just (Luke 14:14) or the first resurrection (Rev. 20:5, 6), seems to have two or more phases. The New Testament passage which most clearly delineates this order is 1 Corinthians 15:20-26.”⁸ This can be further explained in the following manner, which is closely associated to the chart of differences between the Rapture and the Second Coming at the end of chapter 2. The resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 is different than the resurrection in Revelation 20 for at least three reasons: (1) That there are different sets of people at each resurrection—the Church at the Rapture in 1 Corinthians 15 and Tribulation Martyrs in Revelation 20 + the Old Testament Saints who will be resurrected per Daniel 12:1-3, 11-13;⁹ (2) That the Rapture, and thus the resurrection of the saints by association, can not take place in conjunction with the Second Coming (per posttribulational theory) because the first resurrection in Revelation 20 takes place after the Second Coming; and (3) That the resurrected dead in

⁸Rea, 24.

⁹Rea, 38-42.

Christ meet the Lord in the air at the Rapture and the first resurrection of the Tribulation and Old Testament saints takes place on earth, just prior to the Matthew 25 judgment and entrance in the Millennial Kingdom of Christ for one thousand years.

Finally, an exploration of the use of the Greek words *harpazo* (for the Rapture) and *parousia* (for the coming of the Lord for the Rapture) by Paul and other New Testament writers was made. After a complete study of all the New Testament uses of both words, it was determined that Paul used them specifically to describe the Rapture and used other words to describe the Second Coming (*apokalupsis, epiphaneia, erchomai*). The remaining uses of *parousia* by James, Peter, and John seem to relate to the Rapture, but not with the same conclusiveness and specificity as Paul. The use of *parousia* by Matthew in chapter 24 of his Gospel is first of all made in the prophetic time setting versus the apocalyptic time setting of its other uses by Paul, James, Peter, and John. And in this context, it is used interchangeably with *erchomai* in relation to the Second Coming. In the original language that Matthew probably wrote his Gospel first (Hebrew), only one word was used for coming—*bow* (see chapter 2 for more details).

When all this exegetical evidence is compared to Bell's conclusions and criteria, the consensus seems to be: (1) The Lord is coming in more than one phase separated by a number of years; (2) The Church will be removed before the Tribulation; (3) The "resurrection of the just" occurs in more than one phase; and (7) That upon proper exegesis of the pertinent New Testament passages, (8) They speak of two separate and distinct Comings of the Lord during the Second Advent.

To endeavor to start from a common frame of reference, chapter 3 begins with the agreement of all concerned that the Early Church Fathers were avid premillennialists. Then, paths diverge somewhat when the pretribulational theologians show that the same Fathers also believed in the “imminency” of the Lord’s return. Next, all the research material available on the writings of the Fathers was investigated, looking for anything that referred, inferred, or otherwise mentioned in any way, shape, or form, the word rapture.

The results of this exploration were presented in the following phases. First, the Fathers’ use of *harpazo* and related terms was addressed. That search showed that the Fathers maintained a clear understanding of rapture as a concept, made many referrals to Enoch, Elijah and Jesus as examples, and specifically made eight references to the Rapture of Christians (four of which were of the Church universal). Next, the eschatological use of *parousia* was compared to *erchomai* (and related terms) in their writings. Although *parousia* was used much more than *erchomai* (and related terms), it was used more as a universal word to describe all events related to the Second Coming and not as Paul used it, exclusively with the Rapture (although, some of the *parousia* citations did only refer to the Rapture).

Next, the direct references to the Rapture were explored. Of those citations (*Shepherd of Hermas*, *The Didache*, Irenaeus, and Victorinus), taken primarily from the first two centuries of the Early Church, it became clear that the Rapture of the Church would take place before the Tribulation and at a time separate and distinct from the Second Coming of the Lord; thus fulfilling criteria (1) and (2) from Bell’s list. And, in

one of the citations of Irenaeus, the resurrection of the just is addressed as being in two separate stages; thereby fulfilling Bell's criterion number (3) also.

Next, the inferences to the Rapture were explored (Clement of Rome, Polycarp, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Chrysostom). Those inferences seemed to confirm that even more of the Fathers understood Paul's teaching on the Rapture of the Church. Most inferred, if not directly stated, that it would occur before the Tribulation or the appearance of the antichrist. A couple gave clear testimony to the Rapture of the Church, but did not place it within the eschatological chronology of events. Two other references were cited that specifically spoke of a posttribulation Rapture, coincidental with the Second Coming. However, as described in chapter 3, the author believes that they were affected by the neoplatonic, allegorical, amillennial thought and writings of Origen (who himself made reference to a Posttribulation Rapture, according to Hauser, Jr. above).

In the final analysis, it was determined that the preponderance of evidence supports the fact that the Early Church Fathers believed in and taught the pretribulation Rapture position. There is not a voluminous amount of evidence from a wide spectrum of the Fathers, yet there are more than two or three credible and authoritative historical witnesses (including several noted Bishops of the Church and the "father of early church eschatology"—Irenaeus) to that fact. This "orthodox" teaching is confirmed by its continued teaching into and through the Medieval Church Period, despite the eschatological position of the newly formed Roman Catholic Church being changed to Amillennialism after Augustine. Additionally, prior to the time-frame suggested by the

posttribulationists for the beginning of the “secret rapture theory” (in the early nineteenth century), there were again more than two or three credible, authoritative historical witnesses to the fact that the pretribulation Rapture of the Church was believed and taught as an orthodox belief of the Church.

Conclusion

The evaluation of the results of this research seems to indicate that the doctrine of the Pretribulation Rapture of the Church was started primarily by Paul (and supported at least by Peter, James, John, and Jude), was then passed on to the Early Church Fathers, who in turn, continued to spread it within the Early Church through their writings. With the rise of Augustine’s Amillennialism, as the “orthodox” eschatological doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, and upon entering the Medieval Church Period (that lasted for about 800 years), this belief was decidedly placed in the background. However, it still maintained an active voice throughout the Medieval Period (in much the same way as miracles, *charismata*, and manifestations of the Holy Spirit also fared throughout this same period).¹⁰ In fact, there are many similarities between where and when “revival” appeared and a renewed interest in premillennial, pretribulation eschatology. But, that remains a separate issue for another time and place.

In the late summer of 2004, Oral Roberts received an eschatological vision from God. In this vision, he was shown that neither the Church, nor the world is ready for the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Second Coming would be separated into two parts—the Rapture of the Church in the clouds (before the Antichrist and the

¹⁰Dorries, 41-55.

Tribulation), and the return of the Lord Jesus the second time to earth to judge the nations (at Armageddon). The Church has not been fully doing its job by proclaiming the Second Coming, in conjunction with preaching the Gospel of the Lord Jesus.¹¹ This concept of preaching and teaching both Comings (Advents) of the Lord Jesus as part of the Gospel appears to be implied in the Great Commission, “and lo, I am with you always, even to the *end of the age*” (Matt 28:20). The Apostles and the Early Church Fathers did in fact preach and teach the Gospel in this manner (boldly declaring both Jesus’ First and Second Comings) and many of them were martyred for doing it.

Hopefully, this thesis has helped to answer the question of when the pretribulation Rapture doctrine began. It is also the author’s hope that this may help to resolve the confusion over this topic in the Church today, encourage the Church to become the pure, spotless Bride that the Lord Jesus is returning to receive, and help the Church to completely fulfill Oral Roberts’ vision to boldly preach and teach both Comings of the Lord Jesus in these Last Days. If this is accomplished, then unbelievers will hear, understand, and most importantly, be ready for the Pretribulation Rapture of the Church and be able to join in the “gathering together to meet the Lord in the air.” Now, according to the last words of the last book of the Bible (Rev 22:20-21), “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.”

¹¹Oral Roberts, interview by Benny Hinn on *This is Your Day*, 20 August 2004, transcript OR542, Oral Roberts Ministries, 7777 South Lewis Ave., Tulsa, Ok.

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