

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ (2)

Introduction:

The apostle Paul introduced a new subject in the 13th verse of chapter 4. He addressed the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. He was not attempting to provide a full explanation of the “coming”, that is, the *παρουσία* (*parousia*), of the Lord. Paul’s explanation was intended to address a specific concern of this church. Some of them were ignorant, confused, and perhaps even distraught about believers who had died before the return of the Lord. The apostle sought to explain to them that their concern was ill-founded, for when the Lord returns He will first raise these “sleeping” ones from the grave, and then they who were alive would join them, meeting the Lord in the air. So will they then be forever with the Lord. And so, in order for Paul to address their concern, he only saw it necessary to speak of this aspect of Christ’s second coming, the gathering of His people to be with Him.

Let us read our paragraph once again, **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**.

¹³But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thess. 4:13-18)

Throughout 19 centuries of Christian history, this “rapture” was understood as the setting forth of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. But a minority of Christians in the 19th century, due to influence of a questionable nature, began to teach that this event was not the same as the full manifestation of the returning Jesus Christ at His Second Coming. They said that this is a separate event from the full revelation of Jesus Christ, which is set forth in, say, **Revelation 1:7**:

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.

They said that this event of 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff was a “secret” rapture, in which the Lord Jesus would not return to the earth, but to the air, to gather His people, and then to return to heaven. He would rapture from the earth His “Church”, which they defined as believers in Jesus Christ from Pentecost to the rapture. After this rapture of the church, they claim, and their departure with the Lord to heaven, then there will unfold the period of tribulation (7 years), even great tribulation (the latter 3½ years). It was taught that this would be a time over which the antichrist will rule, a time in which the Lord will pour out great judgments on the earth. It would be a time of great suffering for the Jewish people, even “the time of Jacob’s trouble.” Only at the end of this 7 year of tribulation, what they call “the 70th week of Daniel”, would Jesus’ Second Coming take place.

This two stage coming of Jesus Christ is the view of the vast majority of “Bible-believing” Christians of the 20th and early 21st centuries. But I would argue it is an errant view of the Scriptures of fairly recent invention. But many of those, who believe in a secret and separate rapture from the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, have never been exposed to any teaching other than this one that they believe very strongly to be true. Their view is the predominant view. It is promoted by some of the most respected Christian leaders in

America.¹ It is promoted by many of the major Christian publishers in the books they market widely.² It is taught by most of the major Christian radio and television ministries. But it is a relatively new and novel teaching. No one espoused a rapture of the church separate from the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, until the 19th century, and it was not a popular, wide-spread belief until the early 20th century.

Considering its popular and wide acceptance, and in the absence of teaching of another view of eschatology, it is our responsibility to make the case against this position, and then to set forth clearly the biblical teaching regarding this important subject. This is what we are attempting to do.

But first let us be clear as to what it is that most “Bible believers” believe. Below is a typical description of the dispensational view of the pre-tribulation rapture and what follows.

Article XVIII—The Blessed Hope

We believe that, according to the Word of God, the next great event in the fulfillment of prophecy will be the coming of the Lord in the air to receive to Himself into heaven both His own who are alive and remain unto His coming, and also all who have fallen asleep in Jesus, and that this event is the blessed hope set before us in the Scripture, and for this we should be constantly looking (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-14).

Article XIX—The Tribulation

We believe that the translation of the church will be followed by the fulfillment of Israel’s seventieth week (Daniel 9:27; Rev. 6:1-19:21) during which the church, the body of Christ, will be in heaven. The whole period of Israel’s seventieth week will be a time of judgment on the whole earth, at the end of which the times of the Gentiles will be brought to a close. The latter half of this period will be the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7), which our Lord called the great tribulation (Matt. 24:15-21). We believe that universal righteousness will not be realized previous to the second coming of Christ, but that the world is day by day ripening for judgment and that the age will end with a fearful apostasy.

Article XX—The Second Coming of Christ

We believe that the period of great tribulation in the earth will be climaxed by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth as He went, in person on the clouds of heaven, and with power and great glory to introduce the millennial age, to bind Satan and place him in the abyss, to lift the curse which now rests upon the whole creation, to restore Israel to her own land and to give her the realization of God’s covenant promises, and to bring the whole world to the knowledge of God (Deut. 30:1-10; Isa. 11:9; Ezek. 37:21-28; Matt. 24:15-25:46; Acts 15:16-17; Rom. 8:19-23; 11:25-27; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Rev. 20:1-3).

Article XXI—The Eternal State

We believe that at death the spirits and souls of those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation pass immediately into His presence and there remain in conscious bliss until the resurrection of the glorified body when Christ comes for His own, whereupon soul and body reunited shall be associated with Him forever in glory; but the spirits and souls of the unbelieving remain after death conscious of condemnation and in misery until the final judgment of the great white throne at the close of the millennium, when soul and body reunited shall be cast into the lake of fire, not to be annihilated, but to be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power (Luke 16:19-26; 23:42; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Jude 6-7; Rev. 20:11-15).³

¹ Those who teach a pretribulation rapture are a “who’s who” of evangelicalism: Charles Stanley, Chuck Swindoll, Chuck Smith, John MacArthur, J. Vernon McGee, David Jeremiah,

² Such as the “left Behind” series, which have sold over 60 million copies. Prophecy sells.

³ This is a selection from the statement of faith of the Dallas Theological Seminary.

There are a number of errant positions presented in the above statement. It advocates that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ will be in two stages, separated by a seven-year tribulation period, which it claims to be the “70th week of Daniel.” It promotes a 1,000 year Jewish millennium on earth. It denies a general judgment of mankind, separating the judgment of believers from that of unbelievers with a 1,000 year kingdom age between the two. It advocates two separate identities for the church and the state of Israel and that they have two different destinies in God’s purpose within history.

In contrast to the above view, we advocate the following: *The Bible foretells a single Second Coming of Jesus Christ, when He will call unto Himself His people from the grave and the world. At His Second Coming Jesus Christ will bring all mankind into a general judgment over which He will preside as the Judge. He will then separate the redeemed from the damned. The redeemed will be granted entrance into the fullness of the Kingdom of God-- even the New Jerusalem in the new heavens and new earth, in which they will dwell with their Lord for eternity. The damned will be consigned to eternal punishment.*

We will first make the case that the doctrine of a pretribulation rapture of the Church, followed by a 7 year tribulation period, ending in the visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ, is not biblical. Let us consider several claims that are commonly set forth to support this errant teaching.

I. The pretribulation rapture of the Church

A. It is commonly taught that the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture is taught in Matthew 24:40 and 41, which in part reads, “one will be taken, the other left.”

Here is the paragraph in which this expression is found, **Matthew 24:36-44**:

³⁶“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. ³⁷But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ³⁸For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ⁴⁰*Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.* ⁴²Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. ⁴³But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

It is taught that this speaks of the pretribulation rapture of the church. The Lord separates His people from all others, it is said. He takes away His people in the rapture. The ones who are “left behind” are those who will have to face living on earth through the seven year tribulation. The very popular 12 volume fiction series written by **Tim LaHaye** and **Jerry Jenkins**, is entitled “Left Behind” based on all these verses in Matthew 24:40f. But the context of Matthew 24 is quite clear in that the ones who are “taken” are not the ones who are blessed of the Lord, but are those who die due to God’s judgment. The “Left Behind” series assumes that the ones who are “left behind” are the ones under God’s judgment, who must go into the tribulation period. The ones God takes away are the Christians that are raptured out of the world before the tribulation. But it is clear from the context that those taken away are taken by God in judgment, that is, they are killed. Just as in the days of Noah, “the flood came and *took them all away*”, so when the Son of man “comes”, those whom He judges *will be taken away*. The ones who are “left behind” are not the unfortunate ones, as the pretribulationists teach, but rather the ones “left behind” are as Noah and his family, who survived God’s judgment. They have been spared by God’s mercy shown to them.

The parallel passage in Luke’s Gospel makes this even more clear. We read in **Luke 17:22-36** we read:

²²Then He said to the disciples, “The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. ²³And they will say to you, ‘Look here!’ or ‘Look there!’ Do not go after them or follow them. ²⁴For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day. ²⁵But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. ²⁶And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: ²⁷They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. ²⁸Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; ²⁹but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. ³⁰Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.

³¹“In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away. And likewise the one who is in the field, let him not turn back. ³²Remember Lot’s wife. ³³Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. ³⁴***I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. ³⁵Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. ³⁶Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left.***”

Again, many of those (not all) who hold to a pretribulation rapture argue that here Jesus was speaking of His coming to rapture His church out of the world. Those “left behind” are ones who must face the end-time tribulation period just before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. But it is apparent here that the ones who are “taken” are ones who die, for the Lord declared that some would be “taken”, the disciples ask the lord the question in verse 37, “Where are they taken, Lord?” Verse 38 reads, “So He said to them, ‘Wherever the body is, there the eagles (rather, vultures) will be gathered together.’” It is clear that these ones “taken” were not raptured, but killed in God’s judgment. The vultures will feed upon the carcasses.

Actually, this reveals that our Lord was not speaking of His Second Coming in this context, but rather He was addressing the sudden judgment of God that would come upon Jerusalem that occurred through the Roman siege of AD 70. Look again at verse 31, which reads, “In that day, he who is on the housetop, and his goods are in the house, let him not come down to take them away.” Our Lord was telling His people that when His judgment was about to fall on Jerusalem, ***they were to flee immediately, without hesitation.*** But when the Second Coming of Jesus Christ occurs, there will be no command to “flee.” Where would anyone flee to? Our Lord was warning His disciples about the judgment of God that would come upon that people, even upon that generation.

B. Those who espouse a pretribulation rapture declare that the rapture is distinct, in that His coming will be *like a thief*; it will be a *secret rapture*.

They argue that the rapture is to be distinguished from the revelation of Jesus Christ, for the first is quiet and secret, the second is manifest openly, for all shall see it. They say that Christ will slip in and snatch His people from the earth and return to heaven with them, to leave the people on the earth wondering what happened why so many people are suddenly missing. And so, they say that when Jesus comes as a thief at the rapture, He will come secretly and quietly, to snatch away His people, and then return with them to heaven. They say that when the rapture occurs, airlines at high altitude will suddenly have their Christian pilots vanish, while unbelievers will be left to crash in their planes. Husbands and wives will be together when the one that is a Christian suddenly vanishes. Mothers have their babies suddenly disappear from their arms. “A Christian doctor who had just made the incision for major surgery, suddenly disappeared through the ceiling of the operating room!”⁴ Members of churches, who missed being taken in the rapture, will realize that they must now face the tribulation, so they meet to make plans and appoint new leadership. All of these scenarios will take place in the future after Jesus Christ comes as a thief in His secret rapture, or so they say.

Here are a few statements of those who hold this view:

⁴ Woodrow, *Great Prophecies of the Bible*, p.p. 1, 2.

“His appearance in the clouds will be veiled to the human eye and NO ONE WILL SEE HIM. He will slip in, slip out; move in to get His jewels and slip out under the cover of night.”⁵

“Quickly and INVISIBLY, unperceived by the world, the Lord will come as a thief in the night and catch away His waiting saints.”⁶

“[The rapture] will be a SECRET appearing, and only the believers will know about it.”⁷

“In the Rapture, only the Christians see Him--it’s a mystery, a SECRET.”⁸

“It will be a SECRET rapture--QUIET, NOISELESS, suddenly as the step of the thief in the night. All that the world will know will be that multitudes at once have gone.”⁹

But the belief that the coming of Jesus Christ is secret because He is coming as a thief, is to misunderstand and misapply the meaning that our Lord intended by the metaphor of the “thief.” Our Lord was not intending to say by the metaphor of a thief that His coming would be as a thief comes *quietly* and *unnoticed*. But rather, the idea is that as a thief comes *unexpectedly*, so *He would return at His second coming unexpectedly by those who were not prepared and looking for His coming*.

One passage that clearly dispels this idea that the Lord will come *secretly* and *quietly* like a thief is **2 Peter 3:10**,

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then *the heavens will pass away with a roar*, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.”

He is coming like a thief comes, not in the sense that He will be quiet or unnoticed, but that He will come when His enemies do not *expect* Him.

By the way, the common teaching of pre-millennialists is that after the second coming of Christ there will be a future 1,000 year earthly Jewish kingdom over which the Lord Jesus will reign as the Son of David. After this 1,000 year kingdom, they say, the world will then be renovated by fire and a new heaven and new earth will be created suited for eternity. But if you consider 2 Peter 3:10, we read the renovation of the heavens and earth will take place at the second coming of Christ, not 1,000 years afterward, as taught by premillennialists. Premillennialists have to put a 1,000 years interval in this verse between the words “come like a thief” and “then the heavens will pass away with a roar” in order for it to conform to their teaching.

Now, the second coming of Christ “as a thief” describes how unbelievers will be unprepared and caught unaware at His coming. In contrast, the Lord’s coming will not overtake His people as a thief surprises his prey. We read in 1 Thessalonians 5:1ff these words:

¹Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ²***For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.*** ³While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴***But you are not in darkness,***

⁵ All of these quotes were taken from Ralph Woodrow, **Great Prophecies of the Bible** (Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, 1989), pp. 2f. However, for reference purposes I have included his footnotes for these quotes. This first of the five is from M. R. DeHaan, **Thirty-Five Simple Studies on the Major Themes in Revelation** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1946), p. 111.

⁶ Smith, Oswald J., **Tribulation or Rapture--Which?** (London: The Sovereign Grace Advent testimony), pp. 3, 10.

⁷ Dake, Finis Jennings, **Dake’s Annotated Reference Bible** (Atlanta: Dake Bible Sales, Inc., 1963), p. 227.

⁸ Fletcher, George B., **Will the Second Coming of Christ be in Two Stages?** p. 2.

⁹ Ford, Herschel W., **Seven Simple Sermons on the Second Coming** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1946), p. 44.

brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. ⁶So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. (1 Thess. 5:1-11)

Here we see that when the Lord comes as a “thief”, it is not in a secret rapture to snatch away His people. Rather, His coming as a thief will result in “sudden destruction” that will come upon them. It is wrong to say that when the Lord comes as a thief it is referring to a secret rapture apart from the second coming when He will judge the world.

C. They say, “The pretribulation rapture can be seen by distinguishing Jesus coming for his saints and His coming with his saints.”

Those who teach that Jesus will come first for a pretribulation rapture, say that in this event He will come “for” His saints. But when He comes back seven years later at the second stage of His second coming He come “with” His saints. But this is a false distinction, one that is not found in the Scriptures. Yes, the Word of God speaks of the Lord Jesus coming “with” His saints. We read in **Jude 14 and 15**:

¹⁴Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes *with* ten thousands of His saints, ¹⁵to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”¹⁰

Clearly this is a reference to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. But as common as the assertion is made that His coming “with” His saints is to be distinguished from His coming “for” His saints as two stages of the second coming, this does not bear up under scrutiny. But even our passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff which they claim to be speaking of a pre-tribulation rapture of the church, in which He is coming “for” His saints, actually states that when this event occurs, they will be coming “with” Him. We read in verse 14, “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep.”

Actually, it is interesting to know that the Scriptures never use expression, “for His saints”, to describe the coming of Jesus Christ as His coming. Yes, the Scriptures speak of the Lord coming and His people rising to meet Him in order to join with Him. But the actual expression that Jesus is coming “for” His saints is not declared forthrightly in the Scriptures. All of the descriptions and expressions used in the Scriptures may be understood as being realized in the one, visible, second coming of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches us that when Jesus returns, He will first rapture all of the redeemed to meet Him in the air, and then we will come with Him to execute His judgment upon the world.

II. The future seven year tribulation before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ

It is commonly believed by evangelicals that the Bible foretells a future end time tribulation of seven years’ duration. It is believed that the rapture of the Church, which is the first stage of the second coming of Jesus Christ, will occur at the beginning of the 7 years. The second stage of the second coming will occur at the end of the 7 year tribulation period, when the Lord comes to set up His earthly kingdom in Jerusalem, a kingdom that will be 1,000 years in duration. It is believed that the pretribulation rapture must be a reality, for the Lord will not permit His church to go through the tribulation period. ***But it is my opinion that there is no***

¹⁰ Actually, however, this may be a reference to Christ coming with His holy angels rather than with His people.

end time tribulation period of seven years in duration taught in the Scriptures. The major reasons for this false teaching may be cited as follows:

A. There is a failure to recognize the fulfilment of New Testament prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies in AD 70.

This event was proclaimed by the Lord Jesus in His Olivet discourse (Cf. Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21). The prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem are commonly projected into the future as applying to a future seven year tribulation. In other words, they take prophecy that was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and assume it as unfulfilled prophecy of events just before the second coming of Jesus Christ. **Ralph Woodrow** sets these two positions of their understanding of our Lord's Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24 in contrast with one another:

Christians who hold the FUTURIST interpretation apply these verses about deceivers, wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences to our time--as things leading up to the tribulation period which they believe will be the last seven years of this age (after the rapture). The abomination of desolation is regarded as an idol of the Antichrist (or the Antichrist himself) to be set up in the holy of holies of a rebuilt temple at Jerusalem. When this happens, according to this position, the Jews will flee into the mountains, for then shall be great tribulation.

The FULFILLED interpretation, on the other hand, holds that the deceivers, wars, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences were things which Jesus said would soon happen--things that happened before the destruction of the temple. The abomination of desolation, by comparing the parallel accounts, was Gentile armies that surrounded Jerusalem to cause its desolation. Upon heeding the warnings of Jesus, the disciples fled from Jerusalem and Judea. What Jesus called "great tribulation" referred to the judgment that fell upon the Jewish nation, resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70.¹¹

B. It is commonly asserted that the church will not go through the tribulation, but will be raptured out of the world before its onset.

They use **1 Thessalonians 1:9f** to argue this, which reads, "For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus *who delivers us from the wrath to come.*" They say that "the wrath to come" is the tribulation, from which the church is delivered from experiencing. But Paul's meaning of "wrath" is a reference to eternal punishment in hell, from which the Lord delivers His people.

They interpret **1 Thessalonians 5:9f** in a similar way. It reads, "*For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation* through our Lord Jesus Christ,¹⁰ who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him." They say that what Paul mean by "wrath" is the wrath of God in the tribulation, from which Christians will escape due to the rapture. But again, Paul was speaking of being saved from God's wrath upon our sin, which would be eternal hell.

They also make arguments from silence, which is itself an error of logic, in order to argue for their position. For example, because they believe that the Book of Revelation is largely chronological in nature and is a prophecy of the end time 7 year tribulation period, and because the word, church, not mentioned from Revelation 4 until chapter 18, they say that this indicates that church has been removed from the world in the rapture before the onset of these events of the tribulation. In answer to this assertion, we would argue that the Revelation should not be regarded as chronological nor should it be interpreted as exclusively prophecy of future, end time events. And besides, we would argue, in Revelation 19, 20, and 21 in which the New Jerusalem and the new heavens and new earth are described, the church is not directly mentioned either. Does that mean the church will not be present there? Of course not. Their argument from silence has no merit.

¹¹ Woodrow, *Great Prophecies of the Bible*, pp. 43f.

But besides the above, the Lord has not promised that His people would escape tribulation, for He declared the opposite. Consider these verses:

John 16:33. “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. *In the world you will have tribulation*; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Acts 14:21f. “And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that *we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*”

1 Thessalonians 3:4. “For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you *that we would suffer tribulation*, just as it happened, and you know.”

Revelation 1:9. “I, John, both *your brother and companion in the tribulation* and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

They might respond to these verses by saying something like this: “These verses speak of tribulation in general, but the church will not go through the ‘great tribulation’, which is that period of 7 years after the rapture of the church and before the second coming of Jesus Christ”. We would answer with our Lord’s words to a local church:

“Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. ²¹And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. ²²Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into *great tribulation*, unless they repent of their deeds. (Rev. 2:20-22)

This entire church age is period of tribulation, through which the Lord Jesus delivers all of His people. Tribulation is more intense at times than other times. It is more severe for some people than for others. But the argument that the Lord would not allow His church to go through the tribulation is not taught in Scripture.

C. The belief in a future seven year tribulation prior to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is based upon an errant interpretation of Daniel’s prophecy of seventy weeks.

Daniel’s prophecy of 70 weeks is in **Daniel 9:24-26.**

“Seventy weeks are determined
For your people and for your holy city,
To finish the transgression,
To make an end of sins,
To make reconciliation for iniquity,
To bring in everlasting righteousness,
To seal up vision and prophecy,
And to anoint the Most Holy.

²⁵“Know therefore and understand,
That from the going forth of the command
To restore and build Jerusalem
Until Messiah the Prince,
There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;
The street shall be built again, and the wall,

Even in troublesome times.

⁶“And after the sixty-two weeks
Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself;
And the people of the prince who is to come
Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.
The end of it shall be with a flood,
And till the end of the war desolations are determined.
²⁷Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week;
But in the middle of the week
He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.
And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,
Even until the consummation, which is determined,
Is poured out on the desolate.”

Daniel had been deported with other young Hebrew youths after the Babylonian Empire had defeated Judah and Jerusalem in 605 BC. God’s judgment was upon the nation for it having broken its covenant with God. Daniel arrived to Babylon as a teenager, but God blessed him there and he rose to become one of the leaders of the empire. Years later, when Daniel was an old man, he had been reading a copy of Jeremiah’s prophecy when he learned of God’s intention and promise to restore His people to their land after *seventy years* in exile. We read of this in Daniel 9:1-3.

¹In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans-- ²in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books *the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.*

Daniel knew these 70 years were coming to an end and he expected that God would soon restore His people to their land.¹² He believed that the Messiah was about to appear and that the kingdom of Israel would be restored. But Daniel did not presume upon God’s mercy, but he began to pray that God’s will would come to pass for his people.

But Daniel had been mistaken in thinking that at the end of their 70 years of exile in Babylon, all would then be restored, the curse of God would be removed from the people and the kingdom of the Messiah would be established. God sent His angel, Gabriel, to reveal the actual time that would transpire until the Messiah would accomplish His work of salvation for His people. We read in Daniel 9:20ff these words:

²⁰Now while I was speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God, ²¹yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. ²²And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, “O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. ²³At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision:

It was then that Gabriel gave Daniel this prophecy of “70 weeks.” Gabriel told Daniel that it would not be after *the 70 years of exile*, but rather it would be after *70 weeks of years*, in other words, after **490 years**, until the promises of God’s salvation through the Messiah would take place. Only then would their sins be fully forgiven and their relationship with God would be restored. Only then would all of the promises of God respecting their salvation be realized; in other words, “To seal up vision and prophecy.” Only then would the Messiah come and accomplish their redemption from sin, removing God’s curse from His people.

¹² Daniel no doubt read the words of **Jeremiah 25:11f** and **29:10ff**. I wish we had time to read these passages today.

Did this occur? Of course it did. And the early Christian witness was that Jesus of Nazareth had fulfilled all that the holy prophets had foretold would come to pass.

The angel Gabriel gave detailed explanation to Daniel about the prophecy of the seventy weeks of years (Dan. 9:25-26). He told Daniel that the beginning of this 490 year time frame would be “the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem” (Dan. 9:25). This is probably a reference to the formal decree of the Persian emperor Cyrus, who commanded that the captive Jews from the Babylonian exile be permitted to return to their homeland and rebuild the city of Jerusalem and its temple.¹³ From this initial decree “until Messiah the Prince”, 69 weeks of years, or 483 years, would transpire.

Gabriel divides these initial 69 weeks into two divisions of 7 weeks and 62 weeks. The seven weeks speak of an initial 49 year period in which the city of Jerusalem was re-inhabited and rebuilt, which takes us through the book of Nehemiah, who led the people in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem. You can read of the difficulty and the “troublesome times” that Nehemiah and the Jews endured even as they rebuilt the walls of the city. And then after the city is re-established in its fortifications, another 62 weeks, or 434 years, are specified “until *Messiah the Prince*.” These 69 weeks of Daniel’s prophecy, therefore, take us from the “official” return of the Jews from the 70 year Babylonian captivity until the appearance of Jesus Christ the Messiah, when He began His earthly ministry of proclamation and reconciliation.

Verse 26 declares that “*after the sixty-two weeks, Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself.*” After 69 weeks would place this event in the seventieth week of Daniel’s prophecy. The 69 weeks of years took history to the onset of Jesus’ ministry, and then when the seventieth week of Daniel began, the Messiah was performing His ministry in the regions of Galilee and later Judea. The Messiah would be “cut off, but not for Himself.” This is a clear reference to sacrificial and substitutional death of Jesus upon His cross in which He died to reconcile His people to God.

What happens next? The Prince determines to bring about the destruction of Jerusalem, the desolation of which would be total and lasting.

And the people of *the prince* who is to come
Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.
The end of it shall be with a flood,
And till the end of the war desolations are determined.

It was our Lord Jesus who pronounced judgment upon Jerusalem and its temple. We saw this in **Matthew 23:37-39**, in which our Lord declared, “*Your house is left to you desolate.*” The city was destroyed within a generation of our Lord’s words. As the risen and enthroned Lord of heaven and earth, He sent forth the Roman armies that brought to pass the desolation of Jerusalem and its temple that He Himself had pronounced.

But what of Daniel 9:27, which reads:

Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week;
But in the middle of the week
He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.

¹³ According to the record of Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, after Cyrus the Persian had conquered the city of Babylon, he was shown the prophecy of **Isaiah 44:24-28** and **45:1-7**, which Isaiah had penned two centuries before hand.¹³ There Cyrus read a prophecy which included his own name. Isaiah foretold that God would raise up a leader named Cyrus, give him victory over all of his enemies, and then Cyrus would enable the exiled Jews to return to their land and rebuild their temple. Cyrus, upon reading this prophecy, did just that—He issued a decree that permitted the Jews to return to their homeland. This decree is recorded for us in **Ezra 1:2-4**: “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ³Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel--he is the God who is in Jerusalem. ⁴And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.” This edict of Cyrus, signalled the beginning of the 490 years until the coming of the Messiah.

And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,
Even until the consummation, which is determined,
Is poured out on the desolate.”

This speaks of the seventieth week of Daniel, which began with the onset of the public ministry of the Lord Jesus. This last seven year period in Daniel’s time frame included our Lord’s entire 3½ year public ministry and, I would argue, approximately 3½ years afterwards. Our Lord initially “confirmed” a covenant with many Jews. Jesus had announced to His disciples who he sent out on a short term preaching mission to go only to Jews.

These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” (Matt. 10:5-7)

Later He would tell a Gentile woman, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24).

But in “the middle of the week”, that 70th week of Daniel, Jesus Christ was crucified, “having brought an end to sacrifice and offering.” As Hebrews declares: “But as it is, He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:26). But then the desolation of Jerusalem and its temple would take place. Even the city and temple, that Daniel prophesied would be rebuilt “in troublesome times”, would be destroyed once again.

And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate,
Even until the consummation, which is determined,
Is poured out on the desolate.” (Dan. 9:27)

But what of the second half of the seven year period? If Jesus Christ was crucified half way through the seventieth week, what occurred in the latter 3½ years? I would argue that for the first 3½ years of this church age that the primary emphasis of mission took place among Jews, because God was fulfilling His commitment and promise to them. Peter would himself declare to gathered Jews, “God, having raised up His servant, sent Him to *you first*, to bless *you* by turning every one of *you* from *your* wickedness” (Acts 3:26). The early church went to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile. But approximately 3½ years after the crucifixion, the Lord Jesus appeared to Paul, and called him to become the apostle to the Gentiles. It would be Paul’s later decision when the Jews refused to hear and respond to the gospel that he announced,

And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “*It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you*. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. (Act 13:46-48)

Why was it “necessary” that Paul first offer salvation to the Jews? Because the Lord Jesus had confirmed the covenant with the Jews for “one week”, which was from the onset of our Lord’s earthly ministry to His crucifixion and through the ministry of the early church. That seventieth week had come to its fulfilment, and God now determined that this Gospel would be preached in all the world, and then the fall of Jerusalem would take place, which occurred in AD 70.

Now I just described the *historic reformed* (i.e. Protestant) view of Daniel 9:24-27. In summary, the seventy weeks of Daniel 9 is a prophecy of the first coming of Christ, His ministry and death, and then of a temporary ministry to the Jewish people with a message of salvation. All 70 weeks of years (490 years) were fulfilled from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile (a. 460 BC) through the appearance of Christ at His baptism, His “anointing” for His ministry, His death for others, and then 3½ years of ministry to

the Jews before the Gospel went chiefly to the Gentiles. All 70 weeks of years were a continuous time period fulfilled in their entirety.

Over against the historic reformed position in the interpretation of *dispensationalism*. It teaches that there is a 2,000+ year gap between the end of the 69th week of Daniel, and the onset of the 70th week of Daniel, which they claim to be a prophecy of an end time 7 year tribulation period. Next week we will address this matter, Lord willing.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. (2 Cor. 13:14)
