

Parousia

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THE Prophetic Pillars OF THE Prewrath Position

Part 2: The Rapture Initiates the Day of the Lord



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Our appreciation cannot be adequately expressed for the overwhelming graciousness shown to us by the hundreds of brothers and sisters in Christ through The Sign Ministries. Your letters and email were an incredible encouragement to Bob throughout the last weeks of his life and continue to comfort his family after his passing. It was a delight to receive each correspondence and so interesting to note every name and address. As we read through each letter to Bob, we were at times moved to tears at the generosity of the sender – the candid stories of similar hardships and God's faithful goodness in the lives of His children – and at other times we were rolling with laughter at your humorous and witty remarks! The entire family was sobered by the outpouring of prayer on Bob's behalf, for his health, and for his comfort and peace, as well as for his family. Thank you. You cannot know how your kindness has touched our lives. We continue to thank God for His servant, Robert Van Kampen. He was a faithful husband, a loving father, a loyal friend, and he is terribly missed. We anxiously await our heavenly reunion, and until then we will continue in the work God has for us. We offer many thanks to you again for your Christian love during our difficult time. God bless you, guard you, and prosper you in every way, all for His glory.

The Van Kampen Family

THE Prophetic Pillars OF THE Prewrath Position

The Second Prophetic Pillar:

THE RAPTURE INITIATES THE DAY OF THE LORD



by Charles Cooper

Introduction¹

Some time ago, while listening to the evening news, it was reported that Yogi Berra gave the commencement address at a prestigious university. The particular news program chose to use only a short statement Berra made to sum up his address. When giving the graduates advice about living successfully after graduation, Berra is reported to have said, “If you come to a fork in the road, take it. You never know when you might need it.” That unique twist on a common phrase was permanently etched in my memory.

One significant “fork” in the road in my life concerns my decision to abandon my belief in a pretribulation Rapture while teaching at a well-known Bible college. The repercussions of that decision in terms of strained relationships and limited access to many conservative evangelical churches are still felt seven years later.

I remain firm in my convictions that neither pretrib, midtrib, nor posttribulationism had provided an ironclad case for their respective positions. After some study, I could clearly see that the truth of the timing of the Rapture is more a synthesis of that which is biblically defensible in pre-, mid-, and posttribulationism. In a nutshell: The Rapture initiates the Day of the Lord which cuts short the unparalleled persecution of Satan/Antichrist with the deliverance of the righteous and destruction of the wicked.

I took William K. Harrison’s advice. Harrison writes:

There is serious honest disagreement among Christians who agree in their loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word,

the Bible, as to whether the rapture occurs before or after the great tribulation. In view of such conflicting opinions, the question arises as to whether it is profitable to continue efforts to settle what possibly cannot be susceptible of settlement, and which is not by any means a fundamental or necessary article of the Christian faith. The answer to this question is not in doubt; *we should continue*. The fact that the problem exists and that *only one of the conflicting opinions can be right* should cause Christians to seek God’s truth. If they approach the subject objectively, without emotional or prideful influences, they will certainly improve their knowledge of the Bible and it may be that as we all seek to learn God’s truth He may give to the whole believing church a real and true understanding of the solution. As we approach the end of the age, the truth in this question becomes increasingly important to every believer and *if there is an answer we should seek it*.²

I not only believed that there was an answer, but I also went looking for it. I do have one particular problem with Mr. Harrison’s statement. He makes a very common error. When considering pre-, mid-, or posttribulationism, most people think that there is only one possibility — only one right position. In reality, there are really two possibilities: *only one position is right or all three positions are wrong*. The fundamental argument of the prewrath position was and is, in my opinion, compelling. After three years of dedicated study of the tim-

ing of the Rapture, I am now more convinced than ever of three things. *First*, that the Rapture initiates the Day of the Lord. *Second*, that the Day of the Lord is the wrath of God against the wicked who remain on earth after the righteous are taken at the very beginning of the Lord's *Parousia* (coming). *Third* and finally, that the Day of the Lord begins when the persecution of Satan/Antichrist (which begins at the mid-point of Daniel's Seventieth Week) is cut short.

The Problem

The exact year, month, day, and hour of the Rapture has been sovereignly withheld from the church. The absence of this one little detail has led to more deception and false interpretation of Scripture than

perhaps any other doctrine of the Christian faith. Amillennialism, postmillennialism, pre-, mid-, and posttribulationism and date-setters have claimed their millions. In my opinion, these positions are all wrong. Why? Because they have all failed to utilize a face-value interpretation of Scripture *consistently!*

Matthew 24:36 states, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone." This verse establishes de-facto that God the Father alone knows the year, month, day, and hour of the Lord's *Parousia*. These words

of the Lord have profound implications for what will be written in the rest of the New Testament. The Father's choice to keep this information a mystery will result in a very generalized presentation of end-time details in the New Testament. Anyone familiar with the New Testament knows this to be true.

Therefore, since Jesus did not know the year, month, day and hour of His *Parousia*, He could only give us a general overview of the events of the end times. We know what will happen. We know how it will happen. We know where it will happen. We know who will be involved. We just don't know when. The best we can do is to know the season.

The Season of the Lord's Coming

Absent of the year, month, day, and hour, the Lord only told us in a very generalized way, the season of His *Parousia*. The Lord said,

Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; even so you too, when you see *all these things*,

recognize that He is near, right at the door. (Matt. 24:32-33) (italics added)

The phrase *all these things* can and does refer back to the events beginning in verses 4 through 31. By analogy, after the beginning birth pangs and the hard labor, one can expect the delivery of the baby. Therefore, the Lord indicates that after the beginning birth pangs (Matthew 24:4-8) and the hard labor (Matthew 24:9-14 with expanded details in 24:15-28) will come the delivery (Matthew 24:29-31). Therefore the season during which believers can look for the coming of the Lord is the season of hard labor (persecution).

Not just any persecution, but a persecution that can only be described "such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall." The Bible indicates that at the mid-point of Daniel's Seventieth Week, Satan will come down to earth having great wrath (Rev. 12:12) and will give the Beast (Antichrist) supernatural powers (Rev. 13:2, II Thess. 2:9). With these supernatural powers, the Beast will begin a campaign of terror against the elect of God (Rev. 13:7; Matt. 24:22). These are the leaves of the fig tree that are a signal that the final season has indeed begun.

Prior to AD 325, the church understood there to be a period of unparalleled persecution by Antichrist as the primary indicator of the Lord's return. The evidence in the writings of the apostolic fathers is so overwhelming that Dr. Larry V. Crutchfield, a pretribber, is forced to write,

A more specific, composite outline of patristic eschatological expectation reveals that the fathers looked for:

1. Tribulation under the Antichrist within the context of Roman persecution
2. Christ's personal, visible return in the midst of persecution to:
 - a. raise the righteous dead (first resurrection)
 - b. rapture the saints
 - c. fight the Battle of Armageddon
 - d. destroy the Antichrist and all of his followers
 - e. bind Satan
 - f. reign on the throne of David with the saints from a restored Jerusalem
3. Establishment of the millennial age...
4. Resurrection (second or general resurrection)...
5. Creation of a new heaven and earth...³

Limited space will not allow me to quote specifically from the apostolic fathers. Suffice it to say that most of the apostolic fathers believed that persecution of the people of God by Antichrist was *the* indication of the soon return of Christ. Jesus' teachings in the Olivet Discourse and the apostolic fathers understanding of the New Testament teachings, lead one to conclude that the *season* of the Lord's return will be marked by the persecution of the people of God.

The Promise

The Lord Jesus declared, and the early church believed, that a chosen generation would face the unparalleled persecution at the hand of Antichrist followed by the Rapture of the church and God's wrath up-

**“But of that day
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on the wicked. There is no explicit promise from God to the universal church that it would be spared the persecution of Antichrist. However, there is an explicit promise from God that the universal church would be spared the wrath of God. Paul writes,

For they [believers in Macedonia and Achaia] themselves report... how you [the Thessalonians] turned to God from idols...to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come... For God has not destined us for *wrath*, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ... (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 5:9) (italics added)

As in 1:10, *wrath* here is used in its eschatological sense, being the wrath of God upon the sinner in the coming day of judgment.⁴ In 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Paul tells us exactly how the Lord will deliver the righteous from His coming wrath. As should be expected, there is no information as to the specific year, month, day and hour. However, we know *what* (the Rapture), *why* (God promised), and *how* (a snatching away), but no specific *when*. The only clue to the “when” is the “why.” God promised to take the church away before His wrath comes. Therefore, there are two biblically defensible conditions placed on the timing of the Rapture: (1) *it will occur during an unparalleled time of persecution by Satan/Antichrist*, and (2) *it must precede the coming of the wrath of God*.

The Rapture in the Teachings of Christ – Matthew 24

The most important passage of Scripture in the New Testament concerning the timing of the Rapture is Matthew 24. Pretribulationists have attempted to rob the Rapture debate of this important passage. By identifying the content of Matthew 24 with Armageddon and its application to Israel, the Rapture question is placed in a state of confusion.

The Lord teaches in the Olivet Discourse, as recorded in Matthew, the complete sequence of events leading up to and including the Rapture of the elect. The Lord indicates that the gathering of the elect of God will occur immediately after the persecution of Satan/Antichrist is cut short (Matt. 24:22, 29) by the initiation of the Day of the Lord. All the lights of heaven will be darkened, Christ will come to deliver the elect and then begin the destruction of the wicked.

The Lord indicates in the Olivet Discourse that the end-times sequence of events will be marked by three phases. Phase I consists of the beginning birth pangs: false Christs, wars, famines and earthquakes (Matt 24:4-8). Then comes Phase II. There will be a period of hard labor (Satan’s wrath through Antichrist): tribulation and hatred (which results in a great falling away) and false prophets (Matt 24:9-14). The final phase will be deliverance: the coming of the Lord and the gathering of the elect which initiates the wrath of God against the wicked (Matt 24:29-31).

In an extended discussion of the hard labor phase (Satan’s wrath, Matt 24:15-28), the Lord indicates that the persecution of Antichrist will be amputated or cut short (Matt. 24:22). In the context, the Lord can only be referring to the persecution that Daniel indicates will last one half of a week (Dan 9:27). Having indicated in Matthew 24:15

that this period of persecution would begin with the “abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel,” the reader is left with no other choice but to consider the three and a half years of persecution as being cut short. To say, as pretribbers insist, that the persecution is cut short *to* a three and a half-year period is ridiculous. Daniel’s original prophecy indicated that a total of *490 years* would be the total time allotted for Israel’s sin and punishment (Dan. 9:24-27). Therefore, the only thing being shortened is the persecution of Antichrist, not the three and a half years or the second half of the Seventieth Week spoken of by Daniel.

Daniel 7:25 indicates that the saints of the Most High will be given into the hands of Antichrist for three and a half years (time, times and half a time). Matthew 24:22 indicates that it is the *persecution* of the elect that will be cut short not the *authority* of the Beast to act for 42 months (Rev. 13:15).

The avenue to reconciling these three passages is to understand the mercy of God. God in His mercy will remove the object of Satan/Antichrist’s persecution (the elect) while He allows the three and a half-year period to continue. In other words, the object of the persecution will be taken away, but Antichrist’s “authority to rule” will continue. This conclusion can be understood in the difference of emphasis as found in Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 13:5. Daniel emphasizes the duration of the persecution of the saints of God. Revelation emphasizes the duration of Antichrist’s authority to rule. Matthew 24:22 emphasizes the duration of the church’s experience of Satan/Antichrist’s persecution until it is terminated by the mercy of God and removed before God initiates His wrath upon mankind. It is perfectly consistent with the mercy of God to grant grace to His suffering elect.⁵

In Matthew 24:29, the Lord states,

“But immediately after the tribulation of those days [is cut short] the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”

While Christ did not know the year, month, day and hour of the Rapture, He clearly knew the sequence of events. God the Son knew the place of the Rapture within the sequence of end-time events, but not the exact *timing* of the Rapture. It is totally within the sovereign choice of God the Father as to exactly how long the unparalleled persecution of Satan/Antichrist will last. Therefore, we do not know *when* in terms of the day and hour, but we know *when* in terms of the “times and epochs.” We do not know *when* in human history, but we do know *when* in the divine sequence of the end-time events — after the persecution of Satan/Antichrist is cut short.

The event described in Matthew 24:29 is the single most important clue as to the timing of the Rapture. The event described in Matthew 24:29 is the sign that indicates the beginning of the wrath of God. It is clear that the Lord lifted His words directly from the Old Testament prophets. Isaiah, Joel and Zephaniah predicted that these very signs would signal the beginning of God’s wrath against the wicked during a time period known as the Day of the Lord.

Joel specifically states that the cataclysmic disturbances in the sky

would come before the actual beginning of the eschatological Day of the Lord when he wrote, “The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood *before* (italics added) the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.” This one fact alone dispels any possible notion that the entire seven year period known as Daniel’s Seventieth Week is the wrath of God. It also gives us the single most important clue about the beginning point of God’s wrath. The Lord states that the Day of the Lord begins *immediately* after the tribulation of Satan/Antichrist is cut short (Matt. 24:29).

With the universe devoid of light, a second sign occurs. The sign of the Son of Man appears in the sky (Matt 24:27, 30). All the tribes of the earth begin to mourn when they see it. Christ is then seen “coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.” Matthew 24:31 then states, “And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.”

The sequence is clear. However, the central question remains. Does Matthew 24:31 refer to the Rapture of the church? The answer to this question will either settle the Rapture question or maintain its confusion. I believe that Matthew 24:31 does refer to the Rapture. There are several reasons for this conclusion.

First, the timing of this particular gathering perfectly fits the biblically defensible conditions for the Rapture. This particular gathering occurs immediately after the persecution of Satan/Antichrist is cut short, but before the wrath of God falls upon the wicked.

Second, the parallel teaching of Matthew 24:31 in Luke 21:28 is Rapture language. Notice, “But when these things [cataclysmic disturbances referred to by Joel, Isaiah and Zephaniah] begin to take place, *straighten up and lift up your heads*, because your *redemption* is drawing near (Lu. 21:28).” (italics added) Most pretribulationist interpreters insist that this text refers to the ultimate spiritual redemption of those believers who survive the Seventieth Week. However, the context of this passage goes against this idea. One who is described as having his back bent over resulting in a head hung down is suffering from a physical burden, not the weight of sin (see Luke 13:11). Luke’s use of “redemption” to describe the release of a physical burden is the more appropriate interpretation. It maintains the figure of speech that began with the phrase *straighten up and lift up your heads*.

Luke 24:21 has a similar usage. There, two men are discussing the life and ministry of Jesus and are reported to have said, “But we were hoping that it was He who was going to *redeem* Israel...” (italics added) Their desire was for physical redemption from Roman rule not spiritual redemption from sin. The term is used exactly the same way in Luke 21:28. The persecution of Satan/Antichrist against God’s elect will result in their longing for physical relief (see Luke 18:1-8). This relief will come at the Rapture. Paul echoes this language of survival and relief in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 when he states, “Then we who are

alive, having survived will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air...”⁶

Third, the gospel of Matthew was written 20 plus years after the death of Christ. Yet, Matthew offers not one word of clarification concerning the teachings of the Lord on the end times. If the coming of Christ in John 12 is the Rapture and if the coming of Christ in Matthew 24 is at Armageddon as taught by pretribulationists, we would expect a clarification in Scripture. Twice Jesus dealt with end-times matters during the final two days of His earthly ministry (Matthew 24 and John 14). Just prior to returning to heaven, the Disciples questioned the Lord about His return (Acts 1). Yet, not one word of explanation is given that Matthew 24 should be understood as referring to Armageddon and that it is different from Christ’s coming for the elect at the Rapture. On other matters, the New Testament writers clarified possible misunderstanding regarding issues of fulfilled prophecy (Matt 1:23), why Jesus did or did not do miracles in a certain place (13:58), misunderstandings about the meaning of Jesus’ teachings (Matt 16:12), as well as many other things. The return of Christ was the most important topic of concern for the Disciples prior to the Lord’s departure to heaven. Mark and Luke intertwined the near/far destruction of Jerusalem in their writings. Yet, not one word was written about two comings and how to distinguish them. There is a reason why the Disciples did not do it, of course. The Bible simply does not teach two *Parousias*.

Fourth, the term *elect* (εκλεκτος) used in Matthew 24 refers to living church-age believers on earth at the Lord’s *Parousia*. The context of Matthew 24 and the usage of the term support this conclusion. *First*, the usage of the word *elect* supports our thesis that Matthew 24:31 refers to church-age believers alive on the earth at the Lord’s *Parousia*. The term *elect* is a collective noun. That is, the word refers to a group of people. It is used to refer to Israel (the nation, Isaiah 44:1), to the Church (Eph. 1:4), and to the Apostles (John 6:70). Israel is the elect of God in two ways — one physical and the other spiritual. In the first sense, the nation of Israel is *elect* to service. Deuteronomy 7:6-7 states,

For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has *chosen* you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor *choose* you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples... (italics added)

Dr. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., when commenting on these verses, states, “Israel was to be God’s distinct treasure set aside for a marked purpose.”⁷ All Jews born of the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are in this category regardless of whether they are saved or lost.

Israel is also *elect* in a second sense (spiritual). The Apostle Paul states that “there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice.” This group includes only those Jews who are elect to salvation (Rom. 11:5). However, Gentiles are also *elect* to salvation (Eph. 1:4). Together, they comprise the Church. Every occurrence of the term *elect* in reference to a group in the New Testament refers to the church.⁸ Is Matthew 24:22, 24 and 31 an exception?⁹

The Bible simply does not teach two *Parousias*...

Therefore, what group of people will be gathered together immediately after the persecution of Antichrist is cut short, but immediately before the day-of-the-Lord's wrath comes upon the wicked — National Israel (in the physical sense) or the Church (Jews and Gentiles in the spiritual sense)? The key to understanding Matthew's meaning is Mark 13:20 which is a direct parallel. Matthew tells us three things about the *elect*. *First*, the persecution of Satan/ Antichrist will be cut short for the elect's sake. Remember Matthew 24:22 which states, "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short." *Second*, the signs and wonders of the false Christs and false prophets during the great tribulation will not mislead the elect. Again, remember the Scriptures. Matthew 24:24 states, "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect." *Finally*, the *elect* will be gathered together to the Lord at His *Parousia* as Matthew 24:31 states, "And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other." Who, then, are the *elect* of Matthew 24?

Mark 13:20 indicates that the *elect* are those whom God has chosen. The verb *to choose* (ἐκλεγόμεναι) is the New Testament's word for election to salvation (Eph. 1:4). This is confirmed in the context of Matthew 24. Matthew 24:24 states, "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect." This verse indicates that the signs and wonders of the false Christs and false prophets will be so authentic that the *elect* of God would be misled, if possible. The point is this: if the *elect* could be deceived, the signs and wonders of the false Christs and prophets of the last days *would* do it. Thank God the *elect* will not be misled!

However, in my opinion this verse absolutely rules out physical Israel (the unsaved nation of Israel) because they *will be misled*. The nation of Israel will make a covenant with Antichrist (Dan. 9:27). At the mid-point of Daniel's Seventieth Week, Antichrist will break the covenant and proclaim himself Almighty God (2 Thess. 2:4). Many Jews will believe him and worship and support him. Revelation 13:8 says, "All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the lamb who has been slain." The object of this verse specifically refers to those who are not elect to salvation and would include unsaved Israel.

Revelation 13:13a and 14a state, "He [the false prophet] performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven... and he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs..." The Apostle John confirms the prophecy of Christ, thus showing that a false prophet will mislead people, both Jews and Gentiles, with great signs just as Jesus said in the Olivet Discourse.

A second key point to remember in discovering the identity of the *elect* gathered at the beginning of Christ's *Parousia* is the fact that the millennial remnant of Israel (the nation) is not saved until the end of Daniel's Seventieth Week (Daniel 9:27; Zechariah 13:8-9; Luke 21:24 and Romans 11:25-26). This effectively rules out ethnic Israel as the group described as *elect* in Matthew 24:22, 24 and 31. Therefore, the

gathering that is indicated in Matthew 24:31 must be those church-age believers who are alive on the earth at the beginning of the *Parousia* of Christ.

The fact that an explicit reference to the resurrection or a catching-up of believers into the air is missing in Matthew 24:31 has caused some to mistakenly identify this event as Armageddon. In their opinion, the fact that the term *church* is not used or that the resurrection and a snatching away are not mentioned rule out Matthew 24:31 as a Rapture passage. However, to demand that all Rapture passages must mention every component of the Rapture (i.e., the resurrection, the gathering, and catching away into the air) is foolish. Of the three undisputed Rapture passages in the New Testament, only 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 mentions all aspects of the Rapture. John 14:1-3 mentions a gathering to heaven, but no mention of the resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15:50-57 mentions the resurrection, but a catching away into the air is absent. The fact that Matthew 24:31 only mentions the gathering of the elect at Christ's *Parousia* does not militate against it being a Rapture passage.

Rather, the fact that the elect is gathered at the beginning of the Lord's *Parousia* is important. How long the *Parousia* of Christ will last is not detailed precisely in Scripture. However, we know that the *Parousia* of Christ begins with the Rapture and culminates at Armageddon.¹⁰ Paul places the Rapture at the beginning of the Lord's *Parousia* (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 4:15). Matthew 24:31 can only be a reference to living church-age believers gathered to the Lord at His *Parousia*.

The Rapture in the Teachings of Paul – 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

The second most significant text in the New Testament concerning the Rapture is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11. The parallel between Paul's teaching in 1 Thessalonians and the Lord's teaching in the Olivet Discourse of Matthew is *compelling*. It is because of this parallel that we shall look closely at this passage.

The Context

In the context of commending the Thessalonians for their great spiritual growth, Paul urges them "to excel still more." Paul recognizes that the Thessalonians have done well, but he wants them "to excel still more" in the areas of sexual purity (4:1-8) and interpersonal relationships with believers and unbelievers. It is from these important subject matters that Paul moves to a discussion of eschatology (1 Thess. 4:13-5:11). Two important issues comprise this discussion. Paul first corrects the living Thessalonians concerning the advantages/disadvantages of the dead in connection with the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Paul then addresses the responsibilities of the living Thessalonians in the face of the coming Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:1-11).

The Problem

The division between Paul's discussion of the Rapture and that of the Day of the Lord, in the English Bible, is indicated by a chapter break. As a New Testament student, you know that chapter divisions are a relatively late addition to the Scriptures. The original Scriptures had

no chapter divisions or numbered verses. However, the translators did not arbitrarily place numbers and chapter divisions in the English Bible. To move from one thought to the next, the New Testament writers used grammatical indicators. One such indicator appears at the beginning of what came to be called 1 Thessalonians 5:1. Specifically, it is the phrase *περι δε* (*peri de*).

Περι δε is used in the writings of the Apostle Paul eight times. In 1 Thessalonians 5:11, the NIV translates the phrase, *now about*. The NASB translates it, *now as to*. Both translations recognize that Paul intended a transition from his discussion of the advantage/disadvantage of the dead at the Rapture to the need for moral responsibility of the living at the Day of the Lord. However, scholars are not in agreement concerning the nature of the transition. Contextually, there are two possibilities: adversative or transitional. A pretribbler like John F. Walvoord would naturally opt for *adversative*. He writes,

The fact that the rapture is mentioned first in chapter 4 before the day of the Lord is presented in chapter 5 is significant. The important subject was the rapture, including the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the translation of living believers. The rapture is not introduced as a phase of the day of the Lord and seems to be distinguished from it... It is clear that 1 Thessalonians 5 is not talking specifically about the rapture, but about another truth.¹¹

Students of eschatology will recognize immediately Walvoord's need to maintain a disjointed connection between the Rapture and the Day of the Lord. Walvoord places the Rapture and the Day of the Lord under the heading of eschatology in general. But there are several reasons to understand a *transitional* connection between chapters 4 and 5 of 1 Thessalonians. In other words, the heading is not eschatology in general, but the *Parousia* of Christ specifically. The *Parousia* of Christ will involve both the Rapture and the Day of the Lord, which are both critically important to believers who will be alive at that time.

Therefore, *περι δε* indicates a transition from one component of the *Parousia* of Christ to another as it relates to believers alive at that time. That this is true can be concluded based on a careful examination of 1 Thessalonians 4:13 - 5:11. Paul writes,

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thess. 4:13-18)

The phrase, "But we do not want you to be uninformed..." is used

"to introduce a new point in a new paragraph (Rom. 11:25, 2 Cor. 1:8) or section (1 Cor. 12:1 and here)."¹² The matter about which Paul instructs the Thessalonians is with regard to "those who have fallen asleep." This figure of speech is used throughout the N.T. to refer to believers who have died.¹³ The purpose of Paul's instruction to the Thessalonians is that they "may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope." The reason the Thessalonians can act differently with regard to the dead is because as the Father raised Jesus from the dead, He will also raise believers from the dead.

Paul indicates by the phrase, "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord," that this teaching is based on the *very words of Jesus*. Paul does not indicate whether the words of Christ were written or came as direct revelation. However, the one fact we know for sure is that whether the words were written or direct revelation, there is no contradiction between them and what Jesus taught. This is what Paul learned from the Lord: "we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord shall not precede those who have fallen asleep." In other words, the living will not have an advantage over the dead at the *Parousia* of Christ. But in fact, "the dead in Christ shall rise first." Those who are living at the *Parousia* of Christ will be caught up in the air with the resurrected dead to be with the Lord forever. With this information, Paul instructs the Thessalonians to comfort one another.

Beginning in 1 Thessalonians 5:1, Paul transitions from his discussion concerning the dead in Christ at the *Parousia* and begins a discussion of the living at the *Parousia*. He writes,

Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, *you* have no need of anything to be written to *you*. For *you* yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While *they* are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon *them* suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and *they* shall not escape. But *you*, brethren are not in darkness, that the day should overtake *you* like a thief; for *you* are all sons of light and sons of day. *We* are not of night nor of darkness; so then let *us* not sleep as others do, but let *us* be alert and sober. For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. But since *we* are of the day, let *us* be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God has not destined *us* for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for *us* that whether *we* are awake or asleep, *we* may live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as *you* also are doing. (italics added)

Unlike 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 which deals with information Paul could tell the people, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 deals with information Paul could not tell the people. Paul could tell the people *what* will happen, but he could not tell them *when* it would happen. Only God the Father knows when the Day of the Lord will come. It will happen suddenly and without warning for the wicked that will be immediately judged. But wise believers will not be caught suddenly and unexpectedly. The reason is not because the time of the Day of the Lord's coming is known, but because believers can understand the "time and

the epochs” regarding the Lord’s return and the subsequent Day of the Lord’s wrath. Thus, believers by living righteously are in no danger of the wrath of God. The Thessalonians are told that they will be taken away before God’s wrath comes.

A Parallel

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11, Paul does not give any indication of the timing of the *Parousia* of Christ. One knows what will happen, but nothing about when it will happen. However, once the unity of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 is recognized, the reader is able to discern a very important connection. The teaching of Paul and the teaching of the Lord in Matthew 24-25 are parallel. In fact, no less than sixteen parallels occur between Matthew 24-25 and 1 Thessalonians 4-5. Note the following parallels:

1. Christ Himself returns (1 Thess. 4:16 with Matt 24:30).
2. From heaven (1 Thess. 4:16 with Matt. 24:30).
3. With a shout (1 Thess. 4:16 with Matt. 24:30 [in power]).
4. Accompanied by angels (1 Thess. 4:16 with Matt. 24:31).
5. With the trumpet of God (1 Thess. 4:16 with Matt. 24:31 [trumpet is unique to Matt[hew] in the synoptic tradition]).
6. Believers are supernaturally gathered to Christ (1 Thess. 4:17 with Matt. 24:31, 40-41).
7. Believers meet the Lord (1 Thess. 4:17 [απαντησις] with Matt. 25:1, 6 [υπαντησις and απαντησις]).
8. In the clouds (1 Thess. 4:17 with Matt. 24:30).
9. The time is unknown (1 Thess. 5:1-2 with Matt. 24:36); it is interesting to note that περι δε introduces both discussions regarding the fact that the time is *unknowable*.
10. Will come as a thief (1 Thess. 5:2,4 with Matt. 24:43).
11. Will come at night (1 Thess. 5:2 with Matt. 24:43 [night is unique to Matt. in the synoptic tradition]).
12. Unbelievers are unaware of impending judgment (1 Thess. 5:3 with Matt. 24:37-39).
13. Judgment comes as travail upon an expectant mother (1 Thess. 5:3 with Matt. 24:8 [cf. RSV]).
14. Believers not deceived (1 Thess. 5:6 with Matt. 24:4-5).
15. Believers are to watch (1 Thess. 5:6 with Matt. 24:42).
16. Warning against drunkenness (1 Thess 5:7 with Matt. 24:49).¹⁴

This evidence is compelling. We are able to conclude that the Lord and Paul are teaching the same sequence of events concerning the *Parousia*. The Rapture initiates the Day of the Lord, which is the wrath of God against the wicked.

The Rapture in the Revelation – Revelation 6:1-17

Just as Paul follows the end-times sequence which the Lord gives in Matthew’s Olivet Discourse, so do the seals in the book of the Revelation. The beginning birth pang of false Christs (Matt 24:5) is represented in the first seal. The false Christ begins his reign by conquering nations (Rev. 6:2). The second beginning birth pang of wars (Matt 24:6-7a) is represented in the second seal of wars (Rev. 6:4). The

third beginning birth pang of famine (Matt 24:7b) is presented in the third seal of famine (Rev. 6:6). The period of hard labor (persecution and apostasy, Matt. 24:9-13) is represented in the fourth seal of death (Rev. 6:8). Satan/Antichrist unleash their God-ordained three and half year campaign of persecution against God’s elect. The fifth seal represents those who are killed because of their faith in Christ as the Lord prophesied (Matt 24:9). The sixth seal represents the sign that initiates the *Parousia* of Christ—the sign in the sun, moon, and stars (Matthew 24:29).

As in Matthew, John indicates that immediately after the sign in the sun, moon, and stars, a gathering of God’s people will occur. Between the sixth and seventh seals, 144,000 Jews are sealed on earth from any experience of the wrath of God soon to fall in the trumpet judgments. A second group of individuals is highlighted in Revelation 7:9-17. *These can be none other than the raptured Saints of the ages*. There are six reasons for this conclusion.

First, the timing is right. It follows the persecution of Satan/Antichrist, but precedes the wrath of God. John is told that this great multitude “are the ones who come out of the great tribulation...” Thus the object of the persecution is removed from earth during the time period known as the “great tribulation.” *Secondly*, the numbers are right. John describes the raptured saints as “a great multitude which no one could count.” The raptured saints of all the ages are the only ones that will literally fulfill this tremendous number of individuals. *Thirdly*, the ethnic composition is right. John proclaims that this great multitude is composed of people from “every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues.” These are the very ones John indicated the Lamb purchased for God with His blood (Rev. 5:9). *Fourth*, their bodies are right. John determines that this great multitude is “standing before the throne [of God] and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands and they cry out with a loud voice...” These can only be individuals who have been resurrected. Paul indicates that the resurrection of the Saints will occur at the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:52). *Fifth*, the multitude sings the right song. The multitude proclaims, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” The word *salvation* is better translated *victory* here. God is not in need of physical or spiritual deliverance, which is what the term usually, means. However, the emphasis here is on the victory God will have against the wicked, which is insured by the resurrection of the righteous.

Finally, the promise is right. This great multitude is promised both spiritual and physical comfort forever. No hunger, no thirst, no heat exhaustion, no tears, and eternal satisfaction are the rewards of the resurrected. This is in contrast to the condition of those underneath the altar in Revelation 6:9 who must wait before they will realize their reward. The difference is that one group is raised and one group is not.

These points taken together argue strongly for the case that the Rapture occurs in Revelation 7 just before the wrath of God comes at the seventh seal (chapter 8), which is the Day of the Lord.

The Critical Question

The critical question therefore is this: when does Scripture indicate the Day of the Lord begins? “A number of pretribulationists hold that the

Day of the Lord begins immediately after the Rapture or at least with the start of the Tribulation,” says Dr. Paul D. Feinberg.¹⁵ Feinberg adds, “I would start the Day of the Lord about the middle of the week...”¹⁶ He concludes that the entire 70th week is the wrath of God, but that the Day of the Lord is an intensified expression of God’s wrath, which begins at the mid-point of Daniel’s last week. Dr. Renald Showers defines the Day of the Lord in a similar way when he writes,

We must recall... in the Scriptures the expression the Day of the Lord has a double sense in relationship to the future... a broad sense referring to an extended period of time involving at least the 70th week plus the Millennium... (and) a narrow sense referring to one specific day — the day on which Christ will return to the earth from heaven immediately after the Great Tribulation.¹⁷

The prewrath position, on the other hand, teaches that the sixth seal of Revelation 6:12-17, which is described in the same language as Joel 2:28-32, is the beginning of the eschatological Day of the Lord. The sixth seal follows the persecution of Satan/Antichrist, and that by definition, must start after Satan/Antichrist’s persecution is cut short. There are three reasons for this conclusion.

First, the sequence is right in the book of Revelation. The sign of the sun, moon and stars is an indication to the wicked that the wrath of God is about to start. This is followed by a great multitude that no man can number showing up in heaven. Then finally, this is immediately followed by the wrath of God to the nations (trumpets and bowls) and the millennial blessings. This is the same sequence developed by Joel, adopted by the Prophets and expanded in the New Testament.

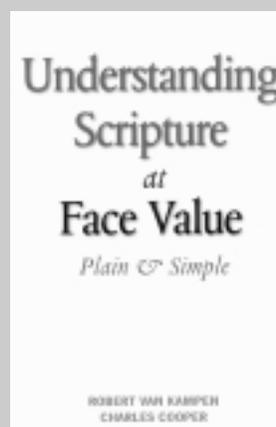
Second, the reaction of the wicked is right. Isaiah prophesied that the wicked would run to hide in the rocks when God comes to “shake the earth” (Isaiah 2:12-21).

Third, the timing is right. The very first Greek word in Rev 6:17 is οτι (hoti). It, along with the verb *has come*, indicates that verse 17 is the reason for the activity in verses 15-16.¹⁸ There are two reasons given for the wicked hiding and seeking death — the face of Him who sits on the throne (God the Father) and the wrath of the Lamb (Jesus Christ).¹⁹ The “face” of God is a figure of speech. God the Father does not have a literal face (John 4:24). The word *face* is placed in the verse to denote His presence or person. This is a very common expression in the Old Testament (Ps. 42:5, 11; 1 Kings 10:24; Lev. 23:40). The wicked are seeking to get away from the presence of God the Father.

The wicked are also seeking death. There is not one single indicator in verses 16-17 that the wicked had experienced any of the Lamb’s wrath prior to this point. Pretribblers have tried to find this notion in verse 17. Notice what the response is of the wicked, “the great *day* of their wrath has come.” It is a specific “day of wrath” that has come. There has been considerable debate about the verb *has come*. Ελθεν (elthen=has come) would be grammatically classified as aorist, active and indicative. For you who have read *The Sign*, this verb is discussed in detail. For you who may not understand anything about the Greek language in which the New Testament was originally written, here is your first lesson. Notice that there are three elements stated: aorist, active and indicative. Greek verbs indicate three important issues for a reader: tense, voice and mood. *Elthen’s* (has come) tense is aorist, its voice is active and its mood is indicative.

Tense means time — yesterday indicates past time, today indicates present time and tomorrow indicates future time. *Go*, *went* and *gone* are three tenses of the verb *to go*. However, unlike English, the Greek language also expresses the kind of action. The Greek language is generally more interested in the kind of action than the time of action. The simple sentence “he walked home” in Greek can mean action in progress (he began to walk home), action ended (he walked all the way home) or simply an event (he walked home). Context is the most

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important clue in determining what kind of action the aorist is indicating. The Greek verb also indicates voice. Voice refers to whether the subject of the verb is doing the action (active); receiving the action (passive); or both (middle). An example of each would be, “he hit the ball,” (active); “he was hit by the ball,” (passive); and “he hit himself with the ball,” (middle). Finally, the Greek verb indicates mood. Mood refers to how a person portrays an action. An action can be portrayed as real (indicative); potentially real (subjunctive); probably real (imperative); or wished to be real (optative). Notice: “you are hitting the ball,” (indicative); “you should be hitting the ball,” (subjunctive); “you may hit the ball,” (optative); or “hit the ball!” (imperative). Please understand that this is a very simplified overview.

With this as background information, let’s look at these three components of *elthen* (has come). It is in the aorist tense. Tense means time. However, in the aorist tense the Greeks were far more interested in the kind of time. Dr. Burton, a great Greek scholar of the 19th century, says, “The constant characteristic of the Aorist tense in all of its moods... is that it represents the action... simply as an event.”²⁰ An event in the sense of a moment captured in time. The aorist tense works much like the old Polaroid camera. You get a snapshot. From the snapshot, all one is able to tell is that an event was captured in a moment. How long it had been going on or how long it continued after the snapshot cannot be discerned from the picture, unlike a video, which would give you those answers. By definition, a snapshot is past tense, but remember, the Greeks are more interested in the kind of action than the time of the action.

William Chamberlain, another Greek specialist, adds clarification when he writes,

A given aorist tense form may have any one of three phases of emphasis: it may accent the beginning of the act, ingressive aorist; it may accent the conclusion of the act, effective aorist;

or it may look at the whole act without particular emphasis upon its beginning or conclusion, constative.²¹

Are the wicked in Rev. 6:17 emphasizing the beginning of the day of wrath, the ending of the day of wrath or whole period covered by the day of wrath? A photographer can capture a runner at the very beginning of the race (ingressive), just as the runner crosses the finish line (effective) or if he could get high enough over head, he could capture the whole raceway (constative). Pretribblers argue that this usage of *elthen* is an example of a constative aorist. That is, the emphasis is not on the beginning or conclusion, but the event itself. I, categorically, reject this conclusion.

The kind of action used here is *ingressive* (the beginning of the action). There are three reasons for this conclusion. *First*, the nature of the verb itself supports the ingressive idea. *Elthen* is a verb that results in a state of being. In the sentence “the audience sat down so that the speaker could begin,” *sat down* would be aorist and the emphasis would be on the beginning (ingressive) of the action, i.e., “began to sit down.” They did not take their seats all at the exact same time, but one or two at a time until they were all seated. This is the idea demonstrated in Revelation 6:17. “The Aorist of verbs which denote a *state* or *condition* generally expresses the entrance into that state or condition.”²² A literal translation of our phrase would be “the day of their wrath began to come.”

Secondly, this would explain the activity of the wicked in verses 15-16. The reason they hide and seek death is because the sign of the Lamb’s imminent wrath has just happened. Joel, and Peter’s use of Joel 2:28-32, indicates that the sign comes *before* God’s wrath. The sign in the sun, moon and stars make it clear that the wicked will be aware that the wrath of God is beginning. When the universe loses all light sources (temporarily) and the glory of God lights up the whole world as a spotlight on Jesus, the wicked will run, hide, and seek death.

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The *third* support for recognizing the sixth seal as the beginning of the wrath of God is the rhetorical question which concludes Revelation 6:17. Notice, “And who is able to stand?” *This is an important clue and interpreters often overlook it.* “All questions serve to simulate and arouse thought in a more vivid and engaging way than is true of statements,” writes John Beekman.²³ He distinguishes between real and rhetorical questions. “The first asks for information, the second conveys information.”²⁴ The first asks a question which someone else must answer. The latter asks a question which he himself must answer. Immediately, we ask, what fact is conveyed by the rhetorical question, “who is able to stand?” There are five possible ways rhetorical questions are used in the New Testament. John Beekman stipulates that “Rhetorical questions in the New Testament transform into statements which function to highlight [1] certitude, [2] incertitude, [3] evaluation, [4] command, or [5] a new subject or new aspect of the same subject.”²⁵ Revelation 6:17 contains a rhetorical question of certitude. Rhetorical questions of certitude “simply express the fact that the speaker is sure of what he is saying; he speaks with certainty.”²⁶ By asking a rhetorical question of certitude, the wicked are stating an absolute fact. No one is able to stand when the wrath of God comes. In statement form the issue is obvious, but the wicked chose to use a rhetorical question to make the point more vivid.

These are not the comments of individuals who have experienced some of God’s wrath already only to conclude finally that they are doomed. Rather, these are men who are suddenly overshadowed by the presence of Almighty God and realize that the wrath of God has begun. They conclude that there is no defense against it. At the very hour that they are saying, “peace and safety,” the lights go out and then the Light of lights will shine.

Conclusion

Concerning the place of the Rapture in the divine sequence of the end times, a clear pattern has emerged. Prior to AD 325, the church fathers, with few exceptions, held to a “post-persecution” return of Christ, which would result in the deliverance of the righteous and destruction of the wicked. This teaching was based directly on the teachings of Christ, specifically given in the Olivet Discourse of Matthew in many cases.²⁷ The Revelation of Jesus Christ to the Apostle John follows the exact same sequence outlined in the Olivet Discourse. The Rapture of the church takes place after the persecution of Satan/Antichrist (sixth seal), but before the wrath of God (trumpet judgments). The Apostle Paul follows the same sequence in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 that the Lord gave in Matthew 24-25. The pattern is clear: the Rapture will initiate the Day of the Lord.

ENDNOTES

1. This is the second in a five part series on the Prophetic Pillars of the Prewrath Position. The futurity of the Seventieth Week of Daniel is discussed in the first article. In the next issue of *Parousia*, we will examine the timing of the salvation of Israel (the nation) in relation to the Seventieth Week of Daniel.
2. William K. Harrison, “The Time of the Rapture as Indicated in Certain Scriptures,” *BSac* 114 (1957), 317-326. (italics added.)

3. Larry V. Crutchfield, “Millennial Views of the Church Fathers,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1996), 255. Italics added.
4. D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 223. Also, see Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 65.
5. See 1 Chronicles 21 and 2 Kings 20 for two examples of God’s mercy with respect to judgment and mercy. God can shorten or lengthen time as He sees fit.
6. Personal translation of the original Greek by the author.
7. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 105. Also, see Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, “Israel and the Church,” in *Issues in Dispensationalism*, Ed. Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 116. Fruchtenbaum offers four reasons for Israel’s (nation) election.
8. See Luke 18:7; Romans 8:33; 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1 and 2:9; 2 John 1:1, 13; and Revelation 17:14. 1 Timothy 5:21 would be an exception referring to elect angels.
9. Mark 13:20, 22, and 27 is a direct parallel to Matthew 24:22, 24 and 31.
10. See *Parousia* issue #8 (Summer, 1998) for a defense of this position.
11. John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 115.
12. James Everett Frame, *Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1960), 167.
13. See 1 Cor. 7:39; 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; and 1 Thess. 4:13-15.
14. Tracy L. Howard, “The Literary Unity of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11” *GTTJ* 9 (1988) 181-182. One should also see G. Henry Waterman, “The Sources of Paul’s Teaching On The 2nd Coming of Christ in 1 and 2 Thessalonians,” *JETS* 18 (1975), 66-75.
15. *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation?* Richard R. Reiter, Paul D. Feinberg, Gleason L. Archer and Douglas J. Moo, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 60-61.
16. *Ibid.*, 61.
17. Renald Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come!*, (Bellmawr: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1995), 70.
18. “Quite frequently οτι introduces a dependent causal clause. In such instances it should be translated *because* or *for*.” This is the conclusion of Dr. Daniel B. Wallace in his book, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 460.
19. This explains the confusion regarding the correct reading of verse 17 as seen in the differences between two popular translations. The KJV translates αυτου (His) and NASB translates αυτων (Their). Either reading is justifiable. I personally favor “their wrath.”
20. Ernest DeWitt Burton, *Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1982), 16.
21. William Douglas Chamberlain, *An Exegetical Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1941), 76.
22. William W. Goodwin, *The Moods and Tenses of the Greek Verb* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1887) 24. C.F.D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 10.
23. John Beekman, “Analyzing and Translating the Questions of the New Testament,” *Not* 44, pp. 3.
24. *ibid.*
25. *ibid.*, p. 9.
26. John Beekman and John Callow, *Translating the Word of God*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 239.
27. The proof for this statement can be easily demonstrated by the clear, direct quotes taken from Matthew in the writings of the early church fathers.

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A Look Back at 1999

The purpose of The Sign Ministries continues to be one of challenging Christians to be Bereans and to search the Scriptures for God's truth. We are committed to letting the Writer of Scripture determine meaning not the reader. As a result of a philosophy that is guided by a face value approach to Scripture, we have received many wonderful opportunities for ministry in this past year.

Our Parousia conferences and seminars continue to be well attended with folks who have a real desire to discover the truth. This past year it was our privilege to share in these conferences and seminars in Houston, Texas; Eau Claire, Wisconsin; Kansas City, Missouri; Cherry Hill, New Jersey; Seattle, Washington; Holland, Michigan; Red Deer, Alberta; Orlando, Florida; Naperville, Illinois; Anderson, South Carolina; Saint John, New Brunswick; and Ames, Iowa. We want to thank everyone who attended and especially those who worked with us to make these meetings so successful.

We also had the privilege of holding conferences in a number of local churches, which is always a special time. We thank the pastors for inviting us and stand ready to be of continued help and service.

Our invitations also brought us to a number of foreign countries. Charles Cooper had the privilege of presenting the prewrath rapture position in Romania, the Czech Republic, India, and in the former Soviet republics of the Ukraine, Russia, and Georgia. Roger Best ministered in India and the Philippines. Both Roger and Charles also conducted pastors' meetings in England.

Our publication ministry continued to expand with a rewritten and updated edition of *The Sign*. We also published *The Prewrath Rapture Position Explained* and *Understanding Scripture at Face Value*. We continued to publish our quarterly newsletter *Parousia* and appreciate the response we have received to this effort. An exciting addition to our promotional materials was the production of a thirteen-minute video outlining our ministry. This video has been packaged with other information and is available to pastors at no charge.

On October 29, 1999 our founder, Robert Van Kampen, was ushered into the presence of the Lord, and even though we sense a great loss, we rejoice in the fact that we have a great hope. The Sign Ministries will go on, and we anticipate an even greater year to come. We are looking forward to doing conferences in Denver, Colorado; Holland, Michigan; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Orlando, Florida; and Boston, Massachusetts. There no doubt will be other locations added as well. We have also received invitations to do conferences in Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, England, and the Philippines and are working on the details at this time. We will continue to present local church conferences as the invitations from pastors are received in our office.

We, the entire staff of The Sign Ministries, express our thanks to all our loyal workers all over the world who helped us prepare the body of Christ in presenting the important biblical message of the prewrath rapture of the Church. It is indeed a joy to know for certain that Jesus Christ is coming again.

Letters & Email of Encouragement

I just wanted to drop all of you a line and express my gratitude for your ministry and faithfulness to God. I have been amazed at the lengths you have gone to answer my questions... Words cannot express what The Sign Ministries has done for my Christian walk... you have changed this twenty-four year-old pastor's view on life, by simply pointing my nose into the Scriptures.

— K.G. by Email

I just got home from the first night of the Seattle area conference... what a class, what a teacher! I'm still waiting for my pair of tickets for *The Fourth Reich – The Movie*.

— J.M. by Email

I would like to thank you so very much for your ministry... I have become more grounded in the Word, have become a study-holic, and am much closer to God than ever before.

— J.H. by Email

I've read a lot of the information [on your web] site... This seems a far more biblical explanation of the end times. I was always what you call a pretribber, but more and more I started to feel uncomfortable with this exegesis. Now this all seems [to be] the answer.

— T.A. in The Netherlands

Thanks so very much for my copy of *The Fourth Reich*! I couldn't put it down. Will you ever be making

a movie of this? I pray that one day soon, someone will produce a quality and scriptural movie of the end times.

— Pastor D.O. in New Mexico

The Sign has been a mainstay on my reading table for several weeks. I have "poured over" it. Without hesitancy, I can say that this is the most definitive book on eschatology that I've ever read. It's very much to absorb, but I have been (and will continue) trying to do so.

— W.M. in Virginia

One of my friends has fully succumbed to the prewrath view now, and it's been incredible to try to answer his questions, study

with him, and talk with him about these things. These last six months have resulted in some dramatic changes in both his and my life. Through studying and praying, we've discovered more clearly what the Bible says about salvation and God's sovereignty.

— N.E. by Email

I have read the book *The Rapture Question Answered* and am now working through it with a Bible in hand. I've also read *The Fourth Reich*. For the first time, I can get a handle on end time events without doing a lot of theological gymnastics to get to a position. Thank you and God bless.

— Pastor R.O.
in British Columbia

Call 1-800-627-5134 and ask for a copy of our free media kit!



Includes a 13-minute video, newsletter articles, a brochure, doctrinal statement, and a list of FAQs.

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