

The Body of Christ in Bible Prophecy

Prophecies Concerning the Church Believers

by

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The Body of Christ in Bible Prophecy

Chapter One

The Distinctions between Israel, the Gentiles, and the Church, The Body of Christ

The Definitions of Each

The Definition of Israel

- ❑ The term “Israel” refers to the people of God who are descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob (Israel). Technically, the term also applies to those gentiles who, during the dispensation of law, became proselytes. However, the term includes both believers and non-believers as it applies to the Old Testament nation as well as to the nation as it will be reconstituted during the 70th week of Daniel. As such, the nation Israel is God’s dispensational household under the law.
- ❑ In the *theological sense*, Israel does not exist today. The modern historical nation of Israel is not biblical Israel reconstituted, although *providentially* (not prophetically or supernaturally) God could, of course, be setting the stage for the re-institution of His relationship with the covenant nation. However, this is not required by biblical prophecy, since God is dealing today with the dispensational household of the church exclusively.
- ❑ The term “Jew” had, by the time of the New Testament, an inter-tribal reference to Israelites. Therefore Paul could speak of “Jew, gentile, church” and not confuse his readers.
- ❑ While the church contains some ethnic Jews today, they lose their spiritual identity as Jews once they enter the body of Christ.

The Definition of the Gentiles

- ❑ The term “gentiles” refers to all peoples who are not descended from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. In the Old Testament the term is used to refer to the *nations* that harassed Israel during her time in the land. Both believing and non-believing gentiles are seen in the Old Testament and in the 70th week of Daniel. Believing gentiles were not considered automatically part of God’s household dealings with Israel unless, and until, they became official proselytes. Today, the term gentile is used in the spiritual sense only for those who are unbelievers. Once a gentile becomes a believer, he is no longer spiritually considered gentile, but church. However, the ethnic sense of “gentile” was still in use in biblical times, and referred simply to non-Jews.
- ❑ While most Christians throughout the church era have been gentiles ethnically, they lose their spiritual identity as gentiles once they enter the church, the body of Christ.

The Definition of the Church

- ❑ The term “church” or “body of Christ” refers to all believers during the present dispensation, beginning with the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2 and ending with the rapture of the church, the time of which is undisclosed. This body of believers is distinguished from both spiritual Jews and Gentiles. While the church is made up of both ethnic groups, the spiritual/religious connotations of those words are not included (Ephesians 2:11; 3:6). Today since the church makes up the household of God only believers are included in that household.

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The Prophetic Destinies of Each

The Earthly Destination of Believing Israel

- Salvation for Israel consists in entering the earthly kingdom of God.

John 3:3-5

Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”⁴ Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?”⁵ Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

- The term “born again” is better translated “born from above” in this passage. It does not refer to New Testament regeneration, but rather to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in preparing Old Testament believers to enter the kingdom of God. There is no need to apply this term to anyone other than that generation of believing Jews and gentiles who survive the 70th week of Daniel, and are ushered into the kingdom.
- The term “kingdom of God” does not refer to a general state of salvation that is often assumed. Such a view cannot be sustained in light of Christ’s audience in this passage. Nicodemus, a Jew of the first century, knew nothing of this modern use of the phrase. His understanding was that of the Israelites of his time who viewed the kingdom of God as the earthly fulfillment of the Davidic covenant.
- Salvation and justification are to be distinguished when referring to the ultimate destiny of Israel. While both are required for that salvation they are not to be confused.

Romans 10:9-13

...that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved;¹⁰ for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.”¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him;¹³ for “Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”

- Contextually, this passage is discussing the salvation of Israel. See Romans 10:1.
- The phrase “confess with your mouth” is not identical to the phrase “believe in your heart” for the following reasons: 1) the word “confess” does not have the same meaning as the word “believe”; 2) the organ for confession is the mouth, whereas the organ for believing is the heart; therefore confession is verbal while believing is mental;¹ 3) the object of the two acts are different in that the content of confession is that Jesus is Lord, while the object of believing is that God raised Christ from the dead; 4) the results of the two acts are different in that believing results in “righteousness” while confessing results in “salvation,” which concepts themselves must not be confused.

¹ The term “mouth” must be understood as being the organ which is the means of confession. The Greek preposition ἐν is clearly used with the instrumental indicating the means by which the confession is performed. The same preposition is used to indicate that the method of believing is “with the heart.” The term “heart” must refer to the mind in this passage, as this is the normal metaphorical use of that term in the New Testament.

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- ❑ The “righteousness” in this passage is the imputed righteousness of Christ that is the means of the justification of the individual. Justification is always said to be “by faith” in the New Testament writings (see Romans 4:1-5; Romans 3:19-24).
- ❑ Contextually, the salvation here is not spiritual, but eschatological and physical (see Romans 11:26).
- ❑ Paul specifically states that the subjects of this discussion are the Jews and Greeks (vs. 12). By Greeks Paul clearly means *gentiles*. Paul states in Vs. 11 that whoever believes of these two groups will not be disappointed. Further he states that if either of those groups “call upon Him” they will abound in the riches of God. To a Jew, the riches of God could clearly refer to entering the Kingdom of God on the earth.
- ❑ Calling on God is another verbal act, and is to be associated with the act of confession. Note that the calling on God of vs. 11 is predated on the fact that the Jew and Greek have the same Lord, which Lord they are to confess with their mouth.
- ❑ Associated with the confession with the mouth is the statement, “Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved” in vs. 13. This quote is from Joel 2:32, where the context is clearly physical deliverance out of the terrors of the tribulation period. The recipients of that deliverance are believing Israelites. In Romans 10 that same calling is expanded to include gentiles who will be alive during the tribulation period.
- ❑ This view is consistent with the fact that Israelites correctly viewed God’s salvation as eschatological and physical, not immediate and spiritual (See Mark 10:17-31).
- ❑ Believing precedes calling in this context.

Romans 10:14

How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

The Earthly Destination of the Believing Gentiles

- ❑ As previously indicated, salvation for the believing gentile (not Christian) consists of entering the kingdom of God. While it is based on justification by faith for the individual, it requires physical survival during the 70th week of Daniel which will be accomplished by confession and calling.

Matthew 25:34

Then the King will say to those on His right, Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

- ❑ This passage relates only to those gentiles who survive Daniel’s 70th week. Nothing is said specifically concerning those gentiles who became believers during the dispensation of law, nor concerning those Old Testament saints who lived prior to the dispensation of law. Presumably they will take part in the first resurrection mentioned in Revelation 20:6.

The Heavenly Destination of the Church

- ❑ The Church consists of a heavenly people.

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Eph. 2:4-6

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus.

- The phrase “in the heavenly places” refers to the present position of the believer, not his ultimate destiny for which it is the basis. Paul’s point is that the believer in this dispensation has a heavenly rather than an earthly relationship with God, and is thereby not bound by earthly circumstances. This is in clear contrast to the nation Israel that is an earthly people with an earthly destiny.
- The individual believer today is a citizen of heaven.

Philippians 3:20-21

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

- According to A.T. Robertson, the term “citizenship” is an “...old verb from *politēs*, citizen, and that from *polis*, city, to be a citizen, to manage a state’s affairs, to live as a citizen.” It is significant that Paul is writing to a Roman city when he presented this doctrine. Some Philippians may have been in danger of becoming entangled with the government practices of the day.
- Robert Lightner’s statement is to the point:

The people of Philippi were living there as colonists while their citizenship was in Rome. Similarly Christians, while living on earth, have their citizenship elsewhere—in heaven. This contrasts with those in verse 19 whose minds are exclusively on earthly things. (Robert P. Lightner, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, “Philippians.”)
- The body of Christ believer is not bound to the governments of this earth. While he is obligated to obey the civil laws of his country (insofar as they do not violate his biblical responsibility), his citizenship on this earth is secondary to his heavenly position. Earthly governments are transient, while heavenly citizenship is permanent.
- The Christian’s heavenly citizenship is directly associated with the future change in the body that will take place at the rapture. Paul uses that future event to emphasize the nature of the current political position of the believer. Since the believer’s body will be changed *in the future* to a heavenly body, he is *currently* a citizen of heaven.

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Chapter Two

The Nature of the Body of Christ

The Uniqueness of the Body of Christ

Ephesians 3:5-6

...which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: ⁶ that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.

- The different views of this passage are well presented by Harold W. Hoehner:

This statement has caused some debate among Bible students. The problem hinges on the comparative adverb “as” (ὡς). Some take this as restrictive (a comparison of degree), which would mean that the mystery was partially revealed in the Old Testament but is now fully revealed in the Church Age. The thought of the verse should be, God has not revealed this mystery in the past *to the extent* He has now. Others see the adverb “as” to be descriptive (a comparison of kind), which means that no revelation of this mystery was given in the Old Testament but that this mystery was revealed for the first time in the New Testament.

The second view is a better interpretation for five reasons:

1. Though the restrictive sense for “as” is more common, the descriptive sense *is* used sometimes (e.g., Peter said that the disciples were not drunk “as” the Jews thought [Acts 2:15]). (In fact, sometimes “as” could be trans. “because,” e.g., the second “as” in 2 Tim. 1:3.)
2. The context supports this view for Paul wrote that this mystery was hidden in the past (Eph. 3:9).
3. Colossians 1:26, parallel to Ephesians 3:5, does not use the comparative adverb “as,” but clearly states that the mystery was “kept hidden for ages . . . but is now” (*nun de*) made manifest to the saints.
4. The position of the temporal adverb “now” (*nun*) agrees with Colossians 1:26 in marking the contrast between the two Ages. In the past the mystery was not known but “now” it is. This is substantiated by the same temporal adverb (*nun*) in Ephesians 3:10: “The manifold wisdom of God” (which is the mystery) is “now” to be made known to the heavenly hosts. If the heavenly hosts did not know of the mystery in the Old Testament, how would people have found out about it? Since the heavenly hosts learned of the mystery through the church (which did not exist before Pentecost) certainly people in the Old Testament did not know.
5. “Revealed” means “to uncover or unveil” something that has previously been completely covered or hidden. Therefore it would be wrong to say the mystery was *partially* uncovered in the Old Testament. Those who hold the first view (“as” is a comparison of degree) argue that passages such as Isaiah 2:1-4 and 61:5-6 indicate that Gentiles received God’s blessings

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along with Israel. However, these passages speak of the Millennium, not of the concept of Gentiles and Jews being in one body, the church.²

- ❑ It should be pointed out that those who hold to the “comparison of degree” view are invariably amillennialists who have a vested interest in finding the body of Christ in the Old Testament, which otherwise ignores the doctrine of the baptism of the Spirit, the unique “in Christ” relationships in the body, as well as the change from a legal to a grace method of pleasing God.
- ❑ Those who hold the “comparison of degree” view regularly confuse the term “gentiles” with the body of Christ, assuming that because the body is made up mostly of gentiles that the term must identify the body. Such a view is unacceptable because the New Testament makes it clear that Jews and Gentiles share the body. The body of Christ is not exclusively gentile, nor should it be identified with the term “gentiles” as used in the ethnic or national senses. The fact that the gentiles are now included in God’s program is the content of the promise.
- ❑ As Dr. Hoehner points out, the Old Testament passages that are regularly used to refer to the blessings of the Gentiles are not a reference to the church, but the kingdom promises. In order to apply these to the church several elements must be observed:
 1. The prophetic kingdom must be taken away from Israel as its primary recipient.
 2. The statements concerning prophetic kingdom revealed in the Old Testament must be “spiritualized” or “allegorized” because their normal meaning clearly cannot be applied to any group other than Israel.
 3. The kingdom reference to gentiles must then be applied to the church in some bizarre way when it is clear that they do not. Rather they expand the prophetic kingdom to include, in a subordinate way, non-Israelites, gentiles.
- ❑ The new revelation, specifically that gentiles “should be fellow heirs,” is unique to the current household of the church, rather than to Israel. In no sense did gentiles *per se* participate in the household of Israel on anything like an equal basis. The question arises, “With whom are the gentiles fellow heirs?” The only possible answer is that they are fellow heirs with Jews. However, as pointed out below, this cannot be in relationship to the Old Testament promises, but only to an “in Christ” promise.
- ❑ This new revelation was not made known in “other ages.” The word here translated “ages” is not the normal word for a period of time, *αἰών*. Rather it is a word which refers to a generation of people, *γενεά*. It refers to previous peoples rather than time periods. Paul is emphasizing that other people who in fact did receive revelation from God, did not receive revelation concerning the body of Christ.
- ❑ The term “holy apostles and prophets” refers to those gifted in the New Testament sense. It is not, therefore, a reference to previous individuals to whom those words could legitimately be applied.
- ❑ “That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs” indicates, as previously stated, a unique relationship to Jews that in the household of Israel did not exist. In the current household program Jews and Gentiles alike share in the same body. This body is not a continuation of or substitute for the household of Israel. The church does not take the place or supersede Israel in God’s program.

² “Ephesians” in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

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- The term “same body” in Pauline terminology refers to the Body of Christ as distinguished from the nation of Israel. Thus there is a “discontinuity” between the program for Israel and the program for the church which is Christ’s body.
- The promise in Ephesians 3:6 is clearly related to being “in Christ.” This clearly limits the promise in the context to the body of Christ program. It cannot be referring to Old Testament believers, who were not in Christ in the sense of this passage.

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Chapter Three

The Resurrection of the Body of Christ

The Term Resurrection

Resurrection Is Distinguished from Rapture

- The word *resurrection* refers to the giving of life to the individual body by the reuniting of the person who has died with a new body. Therefore, the word “resurrection” should only be applied to those who have died physically. The change of the body that accompanies the resurrection should be distinguished from it, as it will be applied to both living and dead saints at the time of the resurrection of the New Testament saints.

The Term “Rapture”

- The word *rapture* refers to the removal from the earth of the saints after the resurrection has taken place. After the change of the physical body into a heavenly body, both resurrected and living saints will be raptured. See Chapter Four for a full discussion of the rapture.

The Nature of the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15)

There is an order of Resurrections

1 Corinthians 15:22-24

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. ²³ But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ’s at His coming. ²⁴ Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.

The Resurrections

1. Christ the First Fruits
2. The First Resurrection – Old Testament believers
3. The Second Resurrection – All unbelievers.

The Mystery Resurrection is not part of the normal order of resurrections. It relates only to the body of Christ. It occurs between numbers 1 and 2 above.

- The resurrection of the saints of this age is not to be confused with the resurrection of Israel and other Old Testament saints (the first resurrection), or the second resurrection, which consists of unbelievers exclusively. Dr. Walvoord says:

“There is no reason . . . to confuse the resurrection of the church with the resurrection of Israel as these seem to be two separate events. According to Daniel 12:1, apparently at the time of the end of the great tribulation described in Daniel 11:36-45, Michael shall stand up and there shall be a ‘time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that time.’ The deliverance of the people of Israel will then take place as indicated in the phrase ‘at that time my people shall be delivered, everyone that shall be found written in the book.’ The deliverance obviously has to do with Israelites still living on the earth at the end of the tribulation.” (Walvoord, *The Church in Prophecy*, pages 78, 79).

- The phrase “in Adam” refers to Adam’s headship of the human race, not his genetic relationship to the race. As such, all human beings are counted guilty of Adam’s sin, and therefore are recipients of the penalty of physical death.

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- Likewise, the phrase “in Christ” refers to Christ’s headship of the human race as one who defeats death. All human beings are “in Christ” in this sense, therefore all men will be “made alive,” a reference to the various resurrections, both of the just and the unjust (see Daniel 12:2).
- Three specific resurrections are mentioned in this passage: 1) Christ the firstfruits; 2) those *who are* Christ’s at His coming, meaning the first resurrection of Revelation 20 which will take place at the time of the second coming; 3) and, the end, meaning the final resurrection of the unjust (see Revelation 20:4-6) that takes place at the end of the thousand year reign when Christ ceases to be the mediatorial ruler.
- The resurrection of the believers in this age is specifically not mentioned in this passage, as it is not part of the regular order of resurrections. In fact, as shown below, it is a “mystery” resurrection, not revealed in the Old Testament. This is consistent with the fact that the church itself is a mystery and therefore not revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures.

The Resurrection of the Believers of this Age is a Mystery

1 Corinthians 15:51-52

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

- The term “mystery” in Paul’s writings refers to those elements of truth concerning members of the body of Christ which were not revealed in the Old Testament. This use can easily be seen from Paul’s other uses of the word (Rom 16:25; Eph 3:3, 4; Eph 3:9).
- Paul’s announcement, “Behold, I tell you a mystery,” is designed to bring the Corinthian’s attention to the change of subject matter. Up until this passage, Paul was discussing the concept of resurrection from an Old Testament point of view. He was proving, beyond any doubt, that the resurrection of the dead was a fact. In verses 22-24 he had laid out the order of resurrections as viewed from an Old Testament perspective, without reference to the resurrection of the current age. Now, in vs. 51, he announces a new and distinct resurrection, not mentioned previously.
- “We shall not all sleep” addresses the fact that “we,” New Testament believers, including Paul, (the “I” of the previous statement) will not all die. “Sleep” refers to the physical body, not to the “soul” or immaterial part of man. This is consistent with the fact that the verb “sleep” is in the future passive in the original. Literally, “we will not be asleep” that is, dead. Remember that the doctrine of the resurrection deals with the physical body of the individual. His personal consciousness is not at issue.
- The phrases, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” signify the instantaneous change of the body. Evidently there will be no process which takes up time for the change to take place.

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- ❑ “But we shall all be changed.” The Greek verb “change” (ἀλλάσσω) emphasizes the going from one condition or state to another.³ The body of the living believer at the resurrection will go from one *state* (not form) to another. That change of state is described in vs. 53 below.
- ❑ While the actual description of the change in these verses deals with the living saint, the implication context of the resurrection implies that this is what will be necessary in order for the living saint to be in a resurrection state. The saints who have previously died will also be in a resurrection state, though their natural bodies will not go through the change in precisely the same way that the living saint’s body will. This is because the dead saints bodies are in various conditions, from virtual non-existence through decay through those who will have been just buried whose bodies will remain essentially in tact. Therefore, the dead saints bodies will be in a variety of conditions at the time of the resurrection, and must all enter into a resurrection state, the same state as the living saint receives.
- ❑ At the last sound of a series of trumpet blasts two events take place in succession. First, the dead is raised in an incorruptible state, and then the change of the body of the living saint takes place. This order of occurrence is consistent with 1 Thessalonians 4, where Paul states that the dead in Christ will rise first.
- ❑ However, as noted, the dead saint’s new body is formulated, his ultimate condition will be that of a resurrected saint. The statement that the dead saint will be raised incorruptible shows that their bodily state will be the same as the living saint. Therefore vs. 53 is applicable to both living and dead saints at the time of the resurrection.

The Resurrection of the Church Saint Renovates His Body

1 Corinthians 15:53

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality

- ❑ The actual change of state of the body at the resurrection is two-fold: the body goes from corruption to incorruption and from mortal to immortal.
- ❑ The root idea of corruption is that of going from a good condition to a bad. When used of the physical body it implies a process of decay. The resurrected body will not be capable of decaying. It will retain its immediate condition without further change.
- ❑ Not only will the believer’s resurrection body be incorruptible, it will be immortal. Immortality is the idea that the body will not be capable of death.⁴
- ❑ Incorruptibility is probably best understood as the broader of the two terms. Since the body will be incorruptible, it will also be immortal.

³ Paul’s choice of words for “change” is significant. The word μεταλλάσσω meant to change, but in the sense of exchanging. If Paul had used it, he would have implied that the living saint would receive a different body than the one with which he started. The other two words translated change, μετασχηματίζω, which means to change form, or disguise, and the μετατίθημι / μετάθεσις family, which have a potential negative connotation, to change sides or to pervert, would have both been inappropriate.

⁴ Some have mistaken this idea, thinking that immortality means simply that the person will not die. Actually, word means that the individual is incapable of dying, which is not precisely the same thing.

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Chapter Four

The Rapture of the Saints of this Age

The Participants in the Rapture

1 Thessalonians 4:14

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus

- ❑ The rapture, like the resurrection, is limited to believers of the current age. Faith in the death and resurrection is the single prerequisite for the resurrection/rapture.
- ❑ Verse 14 is a conditional sentence with an “if” clause (the protasis) and a “then”⁵ clause (the apodasis). The condition expressed is the first class. It indicates that “if we believe and we do,” the result expressed in the next clause will be true of us.
- ❑ The condition requirement expressed, which those who believe fulfill, is faith in the simple gospel of salvation. This statement can only refer to believers after the events of the cross. The teaching in this passages does not relate to believers prior to the death and resurrection of Christ. Further, the expression “those who sleep in Jesus” further defines the subject of this passage as being limited to those whose death is an “in Jesus” kind of death. In Pauline terminology, such a phrase can only refer to members of the body of Christ, that is, to those who are related to God exclusively through the household of the church.
- ❑ The “then” clause expresses the result of the fulfillment of the “if” clause. God the Father will bring with God the Son (*with Him*) the Christians who have died. The disembodied saint will accompany the Lord Jesus when He comes to the atmosphere to resurrection believers who are in the body of Christ.
- ❑ The view that “in Jesus” refers to the position of the believer in the body of Christ is held by most premillennial expositors. However, some have taken the phrase to refer to all the righteous dead throughout time. This second view seems improbable since, as stated previously, “in Jesus” appears to refer to those who had placed faith in the death and resurrection of Christ, which could not be true of Old Testament believers.

The Order of the Rapture

1 Thessalonians 4:15

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

- ❑ Because some had presented confusing data concerning the timing of the resurrection, Paul begins 4:15 with the claim of authority for his subsequent communication. “We say” is an editorial comment, though some have expressed the idea that Paul is including Timothy and Silvanus in the pronoun “we.” More likely Paul is making an editorial statement and referring to himself alone. Note verse 13, where Paul uses the first person pronoun “I” and appears to be

⁵ The term “then clause” is used conventionally of the fulfillment clause of a conditional sentence, even though the word “then” is not always used to introduce such a clause.

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speaking personally to the Thessalonians.⁶ Paul claims to be speaking “by the word of the Lord.” The best understanding of this is that he is claiming to be the agent of a direct revelation by Christ. The phrase “word of the Lord” is a figurative statement meaning “the communication of the Lord.” Christ communicated the truth being expressed directly to Paul.

- The direct revelation involved had to do with the order of precedence in the resurrection. Two groups of believers are envisioned: 1) those who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, and 2) those who are asleep, that is, the dead. It is precisely this contrast which indicates that “those who are asleep” are actually dead in the physical sense. Not only are they no longer alive, they do not “remain” that is, they have departed. Clearly this passage indicates that the Christian saints who have died have been with the Lord Jesus Christ, and will return with Him.
- The order of events is clear. Those who are alive and remain will “not precede” those who are asleep (dead), and therefore did not remain. This is further explained in vs. 16 below.

The Events of the Rapture.

1 Thessalonians 4:16

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

- The explanation for the order of the resurrection is given in this verse. Unfortunately, the force of the expression is lost in the English translation. Literally the verse reads, “The Lord Himself, with a command, with the archangel’s voice, with God’s trumpet will descend from Heaven.”
- The three events that accompany Christ’s descent are best thought of as expressions of announcement. Whether they will be simultaneous or sequential is unknown. Whether they will be heard on earth or in heaven or both is not stated. Much speculation has been made concerning these three elements, but frankly, no information is given. This verse is not written to satisfy the reader’s curiosity. It is written to express the importance of the event from God’s viewpoint.
- Some have said that the “shout” or “command” is Christ calling the dead out of their graves. Perhaps, but we shall not know for certain until the event occurs. The statement does not say that Christ’ does the commanding, though that seems likely because of the importance of the event. Nevertheless, we do not know for sure, as the grammatical statement is not specific.
- The archangel is Michael, the only archangel mentioned in Scripture.⁷ The word which is translated “voice” can mean “sound” or “noise.” However, when associated with a person, as it is here, it is best understood as voice. What exactly the archangel says is not given, and it is useless to speculate.

⁶ Interestingly, the “we” of verse 14 cannot refer to the same group as the “we” of verse 15. In vs. 14 Paul is including himself with his readers, whereas in vs. 15 Paul distinguishes himself from the readers, to whom he refers as “you.” Paul includes himself with those who are alive because this was his momentary expectation. He is not denying the possibility that he might die before the Lord would return for the believers, but that it was possible, even at that time from a human point of view, for the Lord to return at any moment. Believers today should maintain that same attitude of expectation.

⁷ The lack of the article before “archangel” does not indicate “an” archangel as expressed in some versions. This does not mean “one of many” but is simply qualifying the kind of being whose voice is in view. Whether there is only one or many archangels must be based on a thorough induction of the biblical data. In this author’s view, such an induction substantiates the truth that only one archangel exists, whose name is Michael.

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- “The trumpet of God” has been interpreted many ways. Some believe it is the military trumpet calling the troops to gather in rank and file. Others think of it as a trumpet call to worship. Some see it as a literal blast on a literal trumpet, others as a metaphorical expression. Taken in association with 1 Corinthians 15:52 it appears to be a real trumpet that sounds a series of trumpet blasts. Dr. Vine, among others, indicates that the “last trump” of 1 Corinthians 15:52 “is a military allusion, familiar to Greek readers, and has no connection with the series in Rev. 8:6 to 11:15; there is a possible allusion to Num. 10:2-6, with reference to the same event, 1 Thess. 4:16, “the (lit., a) trump of God” (the absence of the article suggests the meaning ‘a [kind of] trumpet such as is used in God’s service’).” This seems a likely explanation.
- The explicit statement is that “the dead in Christ will rise first.” Members of the body of Christ who have died will rise before those who are still alive and remain on the earth. Thus the fears of the Thessalonians are allayed that those who have died will not participate in the resurrection.

The Location of the Rapture

1 Thessalonians 4:17a

Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

- This first sentence in vs. 17 contains the verb that has given expression to the term “rapture.”⁸ It is translated in our version “shall be caught up.” Concerning the Greek word Vine’s comments are extremely helpful, “HARPAZO . . ., to snatch or catch away, is said of the act of the Spirit of the Lord in regard to Philip in Acts 8:39; of Paul in being caught up to Paradise, 2 Cor. 12:2, 4; of the Rapture of the saints at the return of the Lord, 1 Thess. 4:17; of the rapture of the man child in the vision of Rev. 12:5. This verb conveys the idea of force suddenly exercised, as in Matt. 11:12 . . .”
- The purpose for this sentence is to indicate where the church saint will meet the Lord. Unlike the 2nd coming of Christ, the rapture does not see the Lord coming to the earth. Together with those who have died, those a living and remaining will meet the Lord “in the air” a clear reference to the atmosphere. The distinction between the two events is therefore evident. Therefore, while this passage does not actually teach the pretribulational rapture, it is consistent with such a view.⁹

The Results of the Rapture

1 Thessalonians 4:17b

And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

- Could it not be argued that a believer who dies will always be with the Lord, even without the resurrection? Yes, but the expression here seems to indicate the final state of that existence. We (the church saint) will always be with the Lord in our final state, that is with a resurrected body.

⁸ The English word “rapture” is derived from the Latin *raptus*, which is related to the verb *rapere*, meaning “to seize.” There is actually no noun translated “rapture” in the Greek text of the New Testament. The Latin verb was used in the Latin Vulgate to translate the word “harpadzo.” By extension the noun “rapture” was applied to the event, even though such a noun does not occur. It is a convenient theological term to the name the event of the “snatching away” of the saints of this age.

⁹ See the next chapter for a discussion of the various views of the time of the rapture.

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Chapter Five

The Church during the Tribulation

Views of the Tribulation

- Only premillennialists have a view of the time of the rapture, as a- and post- millennialists allegorize the passages dealing with the event, and see the kingdom of God in a completely different way than premillennialists. Therefore, for the sake of argument it is assumed that each of the views below are expressed from a premillennial viewpoint.

The Posttribulation View Of The Rapture

- This is the view that the rapture occurs after Daniel's 70th week. There are two major problems with this approach. First, it has the church going through the 70th week of Daniel, and thus confuses the grace believer in the current age with the law believer of the previous age. Second, the rapture is seen to include all believers throughout the 70th week, including Jews and gentiles, as well as those members of the body of Christ. Therefore, only resurrected believers are left, who, presumably are heaven bound with Christ. Who then is left to inhabit the kingdom? No one, it seems, unless one postulates that some believers are left behind to inhabit the earth. Clearly, this approach turns many of the Old Testament prophecies about the kingdom of God on their head.
- For a complete discussion of this view see "The Post-tribulation Rapture Error" by Dr. Bernard E. Northrup, Th.D. This position paper can be obtained from the author of this work.

The Mid-tribulation/Pre-wrath View of the Rapture

- Two different view are presented under this heading because they are essentially the same error, but arrived at somewhat differently. Both violate the dispensational (grace) distinctions between Israel and the church. The specific point of difference between the two is that the midtribulation view sees the wrath of God being expressed by the abomination of desolation precisely at the middle of the 70th week, while the pre-wrath view sees that wrath coming close to 2/3s of the way through the 70th week.
- For a thorough discussion of the prewrath view of the rapture see "A Review of *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*" by Gerald B. Stanton found in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, V148, #589, Jan 91, pg. 111. This article also presents in passing many of the arguments ranged against the mid-tribulation view.

The Pretribulation View of the Rapture

- This view essentially sees that the rapture of the church precedes the 70th week of Daniel. It will be discussed in detail below.

The Pretribulation View Examined

Some General Statements

- Gerald Stanton makes the following observations:

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The Tribulation does not deal with the Church at all, but with the purification of Israel. It is not the “time of the Church’s trouble,” but the “time of Jacob’s trouble.” The emphasis of the Tribulation is primarily Jewish. This fact is borne out by Old Testament Scriptures (Deut. 4: 30; Jer. 30: 7; Ezek. 20: 37; Dan. 12:1; Zech. 13:8-9), by the Olivet Discourse of Christ (Matt. 24:9-26), and by the book of Revelation itself (Rev. 7:4-8; 12:1-2; 17, etc.). It concerns “Daniel’s people,” the coming of “false Messiah,” the preaching of the “gospel of the kingdom,” flight on the “sabbath,” the temple and the “holy place,” the land of Judea, the city of Jerusalem, the twelve “tribes of the children of Israel,” the “son of Moses,” “signs” in the heavens, the “covenant” with the Beast, the “sanctuary,” the “sacrifice and the oblation” of the temple ritual. These all speak of Israel and clearly demonstrate that the Tribulation is largely a time when God deals with His ancient people prior to their entrance into the promised kingdom. The many Old Testament prophecies yet to be fulfilled for Israel further indicate a future time when God will deal with this nation (Deut. 30:1-6; Jer. 30:8-10, etc.).

(Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept From The Hour: Biblical Evidence for the Pretribulational Return of Christ*, 4th edition (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 35-36.)

The Distinction between the Rapture and the 2nd Coming of Christ

- Thomas Ice presents clear biblical evidence that the 2nd coming of Christ and the rapture are distinct events:

The rapture is most clearly presented in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. In verse 17 the English phrase “caught up” translates the Greek word “harpázô,” which means “to seize upon with force” or “to snatch up.” Latin translators of the Bible used the word “rapere,” the root of the English term “rapture.” At the rapture living believers will be “caught up” in the air, translated into the clouds, in a moment of time.

The rapture is characterized in the Bible as a “translation coming” (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thes. 4:15-17) in which Christ comes for His church. The second advent is Christ returning with His saints, descending from heaven to establish His earthly kingdom (Zech. 14:4-5; Mat. 24:27-31). (Thomas Ice, “The Rapture and the Second Coming: An Important Distinction” from the internet address www.raptureme.com)

The Deliverance from Coming Wrath

1 Thessalonians 1:10

...and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

- The grammar of this verse indicates that church saints have actually already been delivered from the wrath to come. Revelation 6:12-17 clearly indicate that the wrath of God is in evidence before the 7th seal, which begins the second half of the 70th week according to most premillennial scholars. In fact, during the first half of the week the evil leaders (vs. 15) hide from the wrath of the lamb (vs. 16) which has already come (vs. 17). The Greek word translated “is come” in the King James Version and “has come” in the NASB and NKJV, is ἤλθεν, the

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orist indicative of the word ἔρχομαι, indicating a past event that could be translated simply “came.”

The Deliverance of the Church at Philadelphia

Revelation 3:10

Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth.

- The significance of this verse can hardly be over estimated. While we do not hold that the various local churches of Revelation 3 represent time periods in church history, the specific statements given in 3:10 to the local church in Philadelphia can be applied to believers in any local church that are significantly similarly to that church.
- Dr. Walvoord’s explanation is one of the best brief discussions of the argument of this verse in reference to the rapture. It is found in his discussion of Revelation 3:10 in the Bible Knowledge Commentary:

This is an explicit promise that the Philadelphia church will not endure the hour of trial which is unfolded, beginning in Revelation 6. Christ was saying that the Philadelphia church would not enter the future time of trouble; He could not have stated it more explicitly. If Christ had meant to say that they would be preserved *through* a time of trouble, or would be *taken out* from within the Tribulation, a different verb and a different preposition would have been required.

Though scholars have attempted to avoid this conclusion in order to affirm posttribulationism, the combination of the verb “keep” (*tērein*) with the preposition “from” (*ek*) is in sharp contrast to the meaning of keeping the church “through” (*dia*), a preposition which is not used here. The expression “the hour of trial” (a time period) makes it clear that they would be kept *out of* that period. It is difficult to see how Christ could have made this promise to this local church if it were God’s intention for the entire church to go through the Tribulation that will come on the entire world. Even though the church at Philadelphia would go to glory via death long before the time of trouble would come, if the church here is taken to be typical of the body of Christ standing true to the faith, the promise seems to go beyond the Philadelphia church to all those who are believers in Christ (cf. Walvoord, *Revelation*, pp. 86-8).

The Apostasy

2 Thessalonians 2:3a

3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first

- Just what is the apostasy which must come before the day of Christ? The two major views are 1) that the apostasy refers to a spiritual departure in the professing church. and 2) that the apostasy refers to the physical departure of the true church before the day of Christ.
- The meaning of term “the apostasy” is a matter of much debate. It is only used 2 times in the NT, (here, and in Acts 21:21, where it refers to an accusation that Paul taught Jews to forsake the Mosaic code). Does the term refer here to a spiritual departure, or to a physical one, that is, the rapture of the church? If it is a spiritual departure of the church, what is its distinct nature

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that causes it to be referred to as “the apostasy?” After all, spiritual departure from the faith has characterized the “church” from the beginning. If this is “the” spiritual apostasy of the church, does it take place before the rapture? If it does, is it then a “sign” of the end times? Such a position seems doctrinally untenable.

- Some have attempted to overcome this problem by saying that this is a reference to an apostasy that takes place during the first half of the tribulation and that the church in view is the “post-rapture church” of that time. Even Thomas Constable quotes this view with approval in his commentary on 2 Thessalonians in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

For a pretribulationist, this view seems highly dangerous. The subject in view as stated in 2:1 is whether the day of the Christ is at hand. Most take this to be the day of the Lord, and the argument of the context is to say that it is not near. Most pretribulationists hold that the day of the Lord begins with Daniel’s 70th week. The “beseeching” of this verse is supported “by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,” that is, by the rapture. Clearly the rapture is inherent in the argument being placed before the Thessalonians. The association of the rapture with the coming of the day of Christ is significant.

- Pretribulationists hold that the rapture occurs first. If the apostasy is to proceed the day of Christ, and if the apostasy is during the first half of Daniel’s 70th week, then the day of Christ does not begin with the inauguration of Daniel’s 70th week. Therefore, the rapture of the church is no longer prior to Daniel’s 70th week, but within the week, perhaps at the middle or near the end of the Tribulation period. The view that this is a spiritual apostasy that takes place during the first half of Daniel’s 70th week is untenable.
- The better view, though held by few, is that “the apostasy” is the physical departure of the church from this earth. This view avoids all the pitfalls of there being a “spiritual apostasy” that is recognizably different from those which have gone before, either during the present age or during the 1st half of Daniel’s 70th week. It avoids the problem of associating a spiritual condition of the church with a person and events that are exclusively related to Israel. Finally, it avoids the ultimate conclusion that a future apostasy is necessary before the rapture can take place, which eliminates the doctrine of immanency.

The Ministry of Lawlessness and the Restrainer

2 Thessalonians 2:6, 7

And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time.⁷
For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.

- Paul said the Thessalonians knew what restrainer was, but he did not identify it here. Perhaps he had told them in person. Something (or someone) is holding back the culmination of lawlessness. Part of the purpose of this restraint is to keep the man of sin¹⁰ from being revealed prematurely.
- Verse seven explains verse 6. Paul explained that the mystery of lawlessness (ἀνομία, see 1 John 3:4) was already at work. The “mystery” (μυστήριον) refers to one of the New Testament mysteries (see also Rom. 16:26; 1 Cor. 2:6-12; Eph. 1:9; 3:3-5; Col. 1:25-27) and therefore unknown before the present age. Here the mystery is the revelation of lawlessness in the world which is already going on, but which will end in the future.

¹⁰ The “he” of verse 6 refers back in the immediate context to the man of sin.

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- Some have thought that this lawlessness is satanically induced. Such is possible, but lawlessness is not exclusively a satanic attribute. Whatever its source, it is being restrained somewhat, and this restraining will continue until the time appointed for revealing the man of sin, at which time the restraint will be removed.
- Various views have been expressed concerning who or what the restrainer is. The most common are
 1. The Roman Empire. However, the Roman Empire no longer exists and the man of sin is not yet revealed.
 2. Satan. One must ask, “In what sense is Satan restraining sin?” There seems to be no way that he is, unless one speculates that this is somehow a reference to the “world system.” But see the comment below.
 3. Human governments: The problem that human governments are restraining sin and the revelation of the man of sin is simply that human governments will not end prior to the revelation of the man of sin. The same can be said of the world system, which is still clearly operative during the 70th week of Daniel. And not all governments restrain sin; some (many, most, all?) promote sin in their laws and programs.
 4. The Holy Spirit. Thomas Constable’s comments in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary* are well expressed on this point.

The Holy Spirit of God is the only Person with sufficient (supernatural) power to do this restraining. Some object to this being the Holy Spirit on the grounds that *to katechōn* in 2 Thessalonians 2:6 is neuter (“*what* is holding back”). But this is no problem for two reasons: (a) The neuter is sometimes used of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14). (b) In 2 Thessalonians 2:7 the words are masculine: *ho katechōn*, the one who . . . holds it back. How does He do it? Through Christians, whom He indwells and through whom He works in society to hold back the swelling tide of lawless living. How will He be taken out of the way? When the church leaves the earth in the Rapture, the Holy Spirit will be taken out of the way in the sense that His unique lawlessness-restraining ministry through God’s people will be removed (cf. Gen. 6:3). The removal of the Restrainer at the time of the Rapture must obviously precede the day of the Lord. Paul’s reasoning is thus a strong argument for the pretribulation Rapture: the Thessalonians were not in the Great Tribulation because the Rapture had not yet occurred.

The Revelation of the Lawless One

2 Thessalonians 2:8

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

- Here the man of sin is called the lawless one. Such interchanging of terms should not surprise us. John clearly indicates¹¹ that “sin is lawlessness” in the sense that one who commits an act of sin commits an act of lawlessness.
- This is the same man who is also spoken of in Daniel 9:26-27 and 11:36-12:1. His career is directly identified with the gentile nations and Israel. Therefore, when the Holy Spirit is

¹¹ 1 John 3:4 in the Greek.

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removed from residence on the earth at the rapture, the man of sin will allow his lawlessness to run rampant without restraint in dealing with both those groups.

- ❑ How will the man of sin be revealed? We look to Daniel 9 for the answer. We learn that this “prince” will establish a covenant with Israel for “one week” that is seven years. Once this seven year covenant is established between Israel and an individual, the identity of the man of sin will become obvious. Until then it is useless to speculate as so many have done.
- ❑ The man of sin, then, will be revealed after the rapture, and will come to his end at the second coming of Christ.

The Dispensational Arguments for the Pretribulation Rapture Position

- ❑ Besides the many biblical arguments in favor of the pretribulation rapture view, several dispensational reasons for this view can be shown. In fact, the true importance of the pretribulation rapture lies in the dispensational distinctives of Scripture. God’s program for daily living under grace is distinct both from the Old Testament and Kingdom (millennial) programs. The tribulation is a re-institution of the program of the Mosaic law. The church will not be on earth during that time, else one would have the anomaly of the church attempting to live under law during a short period of time. Or else there would be two households in existence at the same time. To which household would a believing Jew belong during the tribulation? Would he get to choose?
 1. The church is a mystery that was not revealed in the Old Testament or Gospels. Therefore, no revelation in the Old Testament can specifically refer to the church as a dispensational household. Hence the tribulation, which is revealed in the Old Testament, is not part of the dispensational truth for the church.
 2. The tribulation was originally revealed in general in the early prophets and was subsequently revealed in detail in Daniel 9 and Matthew 24 and 25. Therefore, it is not part of the mystery of the dispensation of grace, which was revealed subsequent to the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.
 3. The “rule of life” for the church under dispensation of grace is clearly said to be mystery grace (Eph. 3:1-3). This rule of life differs from the rule of life under the Mosaic code which will be in force during the tribulation.
 4. Under the Mosaic code the rule of life for Israel was the law that Moses dispensed after having received it from God on Mt. Sinai. This rule of life is clearly the same rule of life that will be in effect during the tribulation (Matt 24:20; Dan 9:27 cf Matt 24:15 where the holy place must refer to the tribulation temple).
 5. Like the church itself, the resurrection of the church is a mystery that is not part of the normal order of resurrections (1 Cor. 15:51). As such, it is not revealed in the Old Testament. However, both the resurrection of Israel and the resurrection of the unrighteous are clearly revealed in the Old Testament (Dan 12). Therefore, the church does not participate in those Old Testament resurrections.
 6. Unlike ages or seasons, which can run concurrently, dispensations cannot overlap in any significant sense. Two dispensational households cannot exist on earth during the same period, else a believer would not know which rule of life for which household he is to

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follow. Therefore, the household of the church cannot run concurrently with the household of Israel.