

# A Defense of the Pretribulational Rapture in Matthew 24:36–44

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## I. Introduction

There are two simple reasons that the Olivet Discourse (OD) is vital for any study of biblical eschatology. First, next to the book of Revelation, it contains the largest prophetic passage in the NT. Second, next to the Sermon on the Mount, it contains the longest, uninterrupted teaching of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> But in contrast to the Sermon on the Mount found only in Matthew 5–7 or even the Upper Room Discourse found only in John 13–17,<sup>2</sup> the OD is paralleled in all three Synoptics, with Matthew 24–25 being the longest of these prophecies.

Of particular interest to eschatology is the fact that the technical term for the future coming of Christ, *parousia* (“arrival, presence”), is found in the Gospels four times—all in Matthew 24 (vv. 3, 27, 37, 39). This makes the Matthean rendering of the Discourse more focused on the second coming (unless one is a preterist) than on the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, an event that prefigures the future *parousia*.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, all views of the rapture within premillennialism have paid close attention to the OD in Matthew 24–25. Yet as Moo admits, “Most

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<sup>1</sup> The Sermon on the Mount contains 1939 uninterrupted Greek words of Jesus (Matt. 5:3–7:27) in the NA<sup>27</sup>, and 1988 in the Byzantine text. The OD contains 1505 and 1537 respectively (Matt. 24:4–25:46).

<sup>2</sup> The Upper Room Discourse has 2915 words in the NA<sup>27</sup>, 2871 words in the Byzantine text. But there are numerous places where the disciples interrupt the teachings of Jesus.

<sup>3</sup> Blaising writes, “The reason for the primarily Matthean focus [in my article] is because Matthew gives the longest version of the Olivet Discourse. Matthew also renders the disciples’ second question more explicit in relation to the *parousia*.” Craig Blaising, “A Case for the Pretribulation Rapture,” *Three Views on the Rapture: Pretribulation, Prewrath, or Posttribulation*, ed. Robert Gundry and Alan Hultberg, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 190–96; (2010), 36 n. 18.

scholars have claimed that the Olivet Discourse is the most difficult portion of the Gospels to interpret.”<sup>4</sup>

Most posttribulationists argue that the rapture of the church is described in Matthew 24:36–44 and that this rapture is the same event as the return of Christ after the tribulation period as mentioned in verses 29–31.<sup>5</sup> Pretribulationist scholars have generally opposed the posttribulationist interpretation by insisting that verses 29–31 and verses 36–44 are the same posttribulationist coming of Christ, and that neither passage refers to a rapture.<sup>6</sup> Blaising observes a transition in verse 36 to the unknown, surprise arrival of the day of the Lord, but denies any reference to the rapture.<sup>7</sup> While his treatment of Matthew 24:3–36 is excellent, he is completely silent on verses 37–44. No treatment is given to the comparison with the days of Noah before the flood, the one “taken” and the one “left,” the thief in the night imagery, or the commands to be alert or watchful.

But pretribulationists must admit that at first glance, the reference to one taken from a field or mill while another is left behind (24:40–41) sounds unusually similar to the pretribulationist rapture described by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4. Jesus’ teaching that no one knows “that day and hour” (24:36) also seems most applicable to the imminent return of Christ at the pretribulationist rapture. But since the “coming” of Jesus in verses 29–31 is mentioned just five verses before the “coming” of Jesus

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas J. Moo, “A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture,” *Three Views*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 212.

<sup>5</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 129–39; Douglas J. Moo, “The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position,” in Gleason L. Archer et al., *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulationist?* 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 190–96.

<sup>6</sup> Feinberg, “The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture,” *Three Views*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 80, 225, 229–31; John MacArthur Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 24–28* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 70–72; J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study of Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), 162, 275–85; Charles C. Ryrie, *Come Quickly, Lord Jesus: What You Need to Know about the Rapture* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1996), 94–97; David L. Turner, “The Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1–41: Interaction with Evangelical Treatments,” *Grace Theological Journal* 10 (spring 1989): 21–22; Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1980), 280–82; John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 85–90; Ibid., “Christ’s Olivet Discourse on the Time of the End: Part I,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128 (April 1971): 116.

<sup>7</sup> Blaising, “Pretribulation Rapture,” 47–50, 61–62.

discussed in verses 36–44, pretribulationists have felt compelled by context to reject a rapture in verses 36–44.

If the rapture is being taught in verses 36–44, the fundamental challenge is to demonstrate contextually how verses 29–31 can refer to the posttribulational second coming of Christ, while 24:36–44 can depict the pretribulational rapture of the church. This article will argue for nine reasons that 24:36–44 speaks of the pretribulational rapture. First, let me offer a brief overview of the Discourse as I understand it.

## II. The Structure of the Discourse

### A. The Occasion

The immediate occasion for the Discourse is the questions posed by Jesus' disciples in response to His announcement that the Jerusalem temple would be completely destroyed (Matt. 23:38–39; 24:1–3a). There are two questions (v. 3b), not three,<sup>8</sup> asked by the disciples. Both questions are answered by Jesus,<sup>9</sup> but neither question in the Matthean account concerns the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Some writers hold that three questions are addressed. John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), 182; Ed Glasscock, *Matthew, Moody Gospel Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 461, 463; James F. Rand, "A Survey of the Eschatology of the Olivet Discourse—Part I," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 113 (April 1956): 213, following Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols., (reprint, Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978), 5:119, claims that the word "sign" should be supplied in the last phrase so that the second and third questions refer to two different signs. The sign of the Parousia is answered in v. 30 and the sign of the "end of the age" is described in v. 15.

Gibbs argues that the two interrogatives in v. 3 signal just two questions: "When [tote] . . . , and what [tis] . . ." Jeffery A. Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia. Jesus' Eschatological Discourse in Matthew's Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 170.

<sup>9</sup> Some dispensationalists maintain that Jesus did not answer the first question since it was about the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem. John F. Walvoord, "Christ's Olivet Discourse on the Time of the End: Part II: Prophecies Fulfilled in the Present Age," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128 (July 1971): 207; Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (San Antonio: Ariel Press, 1982), 435; Thomas Ice, "The Olivet Discourse," in Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, gen. eds., *The End Times Controversy: The Second Coming under Attack* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2003), 159, 161, 163; Randall Price, *The Coming Last Days Temple* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1999), 280.

- 1) when will “these things”<sup>11</sup> take place? and
- 2) what will be “the sign of Your coming [*parousia*], and of the end of the age?”<sup>12</sup>

But Hagner (a nondispensationalist) also holds the same view. Donald Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, Word Biblical Commentary 33b (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 688. Carson asks why Matthew retains the first question if Jesus does not answer it. He also argues that Jesus’ answer is opaque or even deceptive if He does not interact with the disciples’ question. D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:494–95.

<sup>10</sup> Some pretribulationists favor a potential, generic fulfillment (type-antitype) of Matt. 24:4–44 in the AD 70 event. Cf. Blaising, “Pretribulation Rapture,” 51.

<sup>11</sup> The NIV, repeated by the NIV11, unfortunately translates ταῦτα (“these things,” Gr. pl.) in 24:3b in the singular, “when will this happen?” Moo seems to disregard the plural (unless he is simply using the NIV English translation). In citing the v., he writes, “‘Tell us, when will this happen [the destruction of Jerusalem] . . . .’” Moo, “Posttribulation Rapture,” 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 212. This heavily influences his structure of the Discourse. “These things” is much broader than the destruction of Jerusalem.

In his response to Blaising’s pretribulation rapture arguments, Moo again overlooks the plural, “these things.” “A second problem is the way Blaising relates the parts of the Discourse to the questions in 24:3. Blaising’s claim that Jesus answers the question, ‘When will this happen?’ in the second part of the Discourse runs afoul of the fact that the ‘this’ in the question refers to the destruction of the temple (see v. 2). It is only in the first part of the discourse (see. v. 15) that there is any reference to the temple; so it is here that Jesus is answering this question. This makes it likelier that Jesus answers the two questions in v. 3 in order, explaining first that the temple would be destroyed and the great tribulation would begin within the lifetime of the disciples (vv. 4–28). It is in vv. 29–35, that focus on Jesus’ ‘coming,’ that Jesus answers the second question. The second part of the discourse (Matt. 24:36ff–25:46) consist of a series of exhortations based on this scenario.” Ibid., “Posttribulation Response,” 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 98.

<sup>12</sup> The *parousia* and the consummation of the age are a reference to the same event and are identified by one sign. The disciples were asking for a single sign that would identify Jesus’ future appearance and the end of history.

Several scholars wrongly appeal to the Granville Sharp rule of Greek grammar to support the fact that the phrase, “the sign of Your coming [*parousia*], and of the end of the age” is just one, single question by several scholars. Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary, vol. 22, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 353 n. 37; Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 688; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Clinton E. Arnold, gen ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 869 n. 15.

Wallace points out a difference between the Granville Sharp construction (article + noun + *kai* + noun) and the Granville Sharp rule. The latter applies only when the nouns are personal, singular, and nonproper. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids:

From a literary point of view, Matthew structures these as a chiasm. Chiastic structures in Matthew are quite common.<sup>13</sup> The chiasm in Matthew 24:3–44 is as follows:<sup>14</sup>

A<sup>1</sup> Question: “When will these things happen?” (v. 3a)<sup>15</sup>

B<sup>1</sup> Question: “What will be the sign [*to sēmeion*, v. 3] of Your coming and of the end of the age?” (v. 3b)

B<sup>2</sup> Answer: “What will be the sign [*to sēmeion*, v. 30]<sup>16</sup> of Your coming and of the end of the age?” (vv. 4–35)

A<sup>2</sup> Answer: “When will these things happen?” (vv. 36–44)<sup>17</sup>

Zondervan, 1996), 270–73). The construction in Matt. 24:3 involves two impersonal nouns. Therefore the Granville Sharp rule does not apply.

<sup>13</sup> Gary W. Derickson, “Matthew’s Chiastic Structure and Its Dispensational Implications,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163 (October–December 2006): 423–37. Chiasmus is seen in the Sermon on the Mount by Michael D. Goulder, *Midrash and Lection in Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1974), 250–69. For chiasmus throughout the entire Gospel, see Ellis, *Matthew*, 10–13; J. C. Fenton, “Inclusio and Chiasmus in Matthew,” *Studia Evangelica IV* (1957): 174–79.

<sup>14</sup> John F. Hart, “Should Pretribulationists Reconsider the Rapture in Matthew 24:36–44? Part 1 of 3,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 20 (autumn 2007): 47–70.

<sup>15</sup> Unless otherwise stated, Scriptural quotations are taken from the New American Standard Version.

<sup>16</sup> *sēmeion* may be either an appositional genitive (“the sign, which is your coming,” v. 3) or an objective genitive (“that which points to your coming”). Holding to an objective genitive, see Gibbs, *Jesus and Parousia*, 226 n. 54; 236 n. 190; Osborne, *Matthew*, 869.

*sēmeion* appears once in the plural in 24:24. There are no other uses of *sēmeion* in the Discourse. This makes it likely that the two uses of *to sēmeion* (singular with the article, v. 3 and v. 30) form an inclusio. In addition, the reference to birth pains in Matt. 24:4 alludes to Is. 13:8–9 and the day of the Lord mentioned there. Then Matt. 24:29 quotes Is. 13:10. This too supports an inclusio.

Blaising sees the mention of false Christs at the beginning and end of vv. 4–28 as also forming an inclusio to the unit. Blaising, “Pretribulation Rapture,” 43. This inclusio is bolstered by the use of *erchomai* (“to come) in the mention of the “coming” of false Christs (24:3) as opposed to the “coming” of the true Christ (v. 30), together with *planaō* (“to deceive”) in vv. 4–5 and v. 24.

<sup>17</sup> Since in the Discourse four extended parables (24:45–51; 25:1–13, 14–30, 31–46) follow 24:44, a natural division can be made between vv. 44 and 45. See also the quotation in the text at note 18 below. Blaising also sees the disciples’ questions in 24:3 as answered chiastically. But Blaising sees the second question of the disciples

The second question of the disciples is answered first. This is signaled by the word “sign” used (in the singular with the article) only at verse 3 and verse 30, forming an *inclusio*. The second question is answered last at verses 36–44.<sup>18</sup>

Beginning in 24:45, the remainder of the OD contains four parables (24:45–51; 25:1–13, 14–30, 31–46), naturally dividing the Discourse between verse 44 and v 45.

## B. Matthew 24:4–31 and Daniel’s Seventieth Seven

From the inception of the Discourse at 24:4, Matthew depicts the future seventieth “seven” (“week”) of Daniel 9:24–27. In verses 4–14, the Lord surveys the *entire* seven-year tribulation period.

Jesus’ use in verse 8 of *ōdin* (“labor pains”), a technical term for the future day of the Lord,<sup>19</sup> supports the interpretation that Daniel’s seventieth seven is the central concern beginning at 24:4. In 1 Thessalonians

as answered from 24:36–25:46 (i.e., to the end of the Discourse). Blaising, “Pretribulation Rapture,” 42.

<sup>18</sup> Gibbs think the whole OD is divided into two parts (24:4–35; 24:36–25:46) and that the second question of the disciples is answered in all of 24:36–25:46. Gibbs, *Jerusalem and Parousia*, 167; cf. also Blaising, “Pretribulation Rapture,” 42. This structural analysis ignores that nature of the parabolic material. Additionally, 24:44 corresponds to 24:36, making a frame around the unit. J. Lambrecht, “The Parousia Discourse: Composition and Context in Mt. XXIV–XXV,” in *L’Évangile selon Matthieu. Rédaction et théologie*, ed. M. Didier (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1972), 327.

<sup>19</sup> Renald Showers, *Maranatha: Our Lord Comes!* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1995), 23–25. The use of the term “birth pains” (*ōdin*) seems to rule out perspectives that regard vv. 4–14 or vv. 4–8 as being fulfilled in the present church age. Additionally, the perspective excludes the direct involvement in war by Jewish believers in Israel: “You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened . . .” (24:6). Perhaps because Israel will be protected from invasion by the corrupt treaty described in Daniel 9:27, Israel will not be at war during the first half of Daniel’s seventieth seven. They will only “hear” of these wars.

Others who understand the future seventieth “seven” of Daniel 9 to be the exclusive purview of Matt. 24:4–28 are Louis A. Barbieri Jr., “Matthew,” *Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 76; Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 318; Ice, “Olivet Discourse,” 166–67; Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 279; Robert L. Thomas, “Imminence in the NT, Especially Paul’s Thessalonian Epistles,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 13 (fall 2002): 193; Ron Bigalke, “The Olivet Discourse: A Resolution of Time,” *Conservative Theological Seminary Journal* 9 (spring 2003): 120–23.

5, Paul used the same Greek word (*ōdin*, “labor pains”) to describe the future day of the Lord. Also, the second (Rev. 6:3–4), third (Rev. 6:5–6), and fourth seal (Rev. 6:7–8) judgments of Revelation, which carry through the first half of the tribulation, parallel Matthew 24:5–8.<sup>20</sup>

The *tote* (“then”) of verse 9 is best understood as a transition to the second half of the tribulation. Verses 9–14 reach the climax of the tribulation as indicated by the phrase “and then the end [*to telos*] will come” (v. 14).<sup>21</sup>

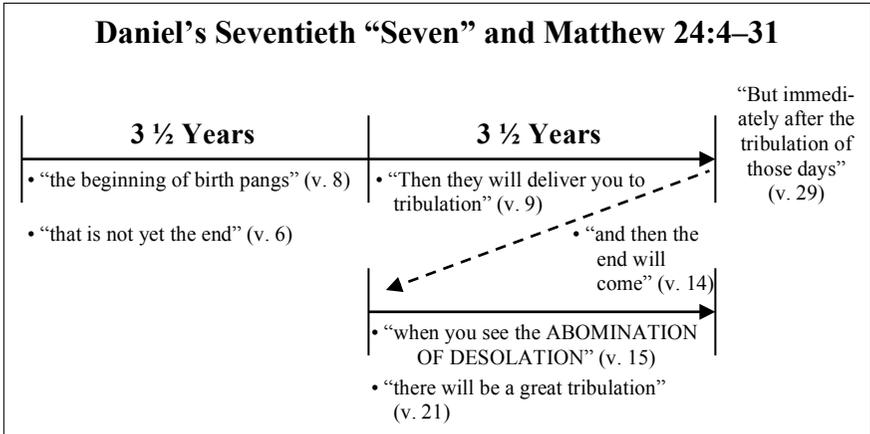
By the literary device of recapitulation, 24:15 returns to the midpoint of the seventieth seven (week) of Daniel 9. The phrase, “*immediately* [*eutheōs*, italics added] after the tribulation” (v. 29), expresses a fixed time reference to the second coming of Christ described in verses 29–31.

The relationship of Matthew 24:4–31 to the seventieth seven of Daniel 9 is diagrammed as follows.

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<sup>20</sup> In Matt. 24:6 (par Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9), Jesus said, “this must take place” (ESV; Gr., *dei . . . genesthai*). This phrase is used in Revelation 1:1; 4:1; and 22:6. In the LXX, it is used only three times, all in Daniel 2:28–29. This tends to support a seventieth seven interpretation of Matt. 24:4–28.

<sup>21</sup> The phrase “and then the end will come” (v. 14) does not mean the coming of a season or period that climaxes history, i.e., the arrival of the second half of Daniel’s seventieth “seven.” The “end” [*to telos*] in Matt. 24 (used only in vv. 6, 14, and *telos* without the article in v. 11) refers to the close of all history with the coming of the Son of Man. The term *to telos* draws on the disciples’ question in v. 3, “what is the sign . . . of the end [*synteleia*] of the age.” Finally confirmation that *to telos* in Matt. 24 means the climactic end of history may be found in its use in 24:14. When Jesus said that “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world . . . and then the end [*to telos*] will come,” He didn’t mean that following this complete, worldwide preaching, the second half of the tribulation would begin. He meant this preaching will not be completed before Christ returns (cf. 10:23).



Verses 32–35 explain how the events of the tribulation are like the spring budding of the fig tree. As the budding of the fig tree in the spring signals the nearness of summer, so the events that transpire during the seventieth “seven” of Daniel give clear evidence of the nearness of the Lord’s second coming. In other words, once the tribulation signs begin, the second coming is highly predictable.

### III. Proofs of the Pretribulational Rapture in Matthew 24:36–44

#### Reason #1: Signs (vv. 4–31) versus No Signs (v. 36)

Matthew 24:4–35 “contains repeated statements regarding ‘warnings’ and ‘signs.’ The whole section is about ‘observing things.’”<sup>22</sup> In verses 32–35, Jesus commands the disciples to “know” from these signs the nearness of the Lord’s return.

“as soon as its branch...puts out its leaves, *you know*” (*ginōskete*, v. 32 ESV)

“When you see...*you know* that he is near” (*ginōskete*, v. 33 ESV)

Some signs in 24:3–29 may be dismissed by some as too general and lacking clear value for determining the nearness of the end of the age, such as the coming of false Christs (v. 5), and wars, famine, and earthquakes (vv. 6–7). Others are precise and clearly identifiable:

<sup>22</sup> Gibbs, *Jesus and Parousia*, 171.

1. the gospel of the kingdom must be preached in the whole world, “and then the end will come” (24:14).<sup>23</sup>
2. “when you see the Abomination of Desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place . . .” (24:15).
3. there will be a great tribulation “such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will” (24:21).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> “However, to see it [i.e., the preaching of the NT message of salvation] as a condition for the return of the Lord essentially nullifies the unknown any-moment quality of the parousia, for it effectively ties the timing of the parousia to the modern accomplishment of these goals.” Blaising, “Pretribulation Rapture,” 37 n. 20. N.B., While it does not need to be debated here, the “gospel of the kingdom” may not be the identical message as the message of eternal life preached in the church age (but may include it).

<sup>24</sup> Carson reasons, “That Jesus in v. 21 promises that such ‘great distress’ is never to be equaled implies that it cannot refer to the Tribulation at the end of the age; for if what happens next is the Millennium or the new heaven and the new earth, it seems inane to say that such ‘great distress’ will not take place again.” D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (EBC 8; ed. Frank E. Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas; Accordance electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), n.p. Cf. also Craig L. Blomberg, “The Posttribulationism in the New Testament,” *A Case for Historic Premillennialism*, ed. Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 74.

This objection might be answered by the following: 1) Jesus did not say, “For *then* [the future day of the Lord] there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until *that time* [the future tribulation] . . .” (italics added). He said, “For *then* [the future day of the Lord] there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until *now*.” Jesus only brought the comparison up to the time of His speaking (AD 33). Without saying further, “nor ever will,” other equally horrendous tribulations could take place after Christ’s death. Imagine a professor saying to her students three weeks into the course, “Your final exam will be much harder than anything you have had up to this point.” That’s far different than saying, “Your final exam will be much harder than anything you have had up to this point, or ever will have in this class.”

2) Jesus’ statement assured the disciples (and us) that the rebellion at the climax of the millennium (Rev. 20:7–10) will not reach the horrors of the climax of the tribulation period; 3) the devastations of 24:21 cannot be devastations in the church age. Can a time be found in which it can be said, “if those days had not been cut short, no one would survive” (24:22)? No devastations of the last 2000 years can compare to the devastations prophesied in the book of Revelation. In just the fourth seal judgment (Rev. 6:8) and the sixth trumpet judgment (Rev. 9:13–15) together, one-half (50 percent) of the world’s population will be killed. World War I and II resulted in the death of 60 million people. But this represents less than 1 per cent of the world’s population of 7 billion reached in October 2011. At the time of the two wars, there was a little over 2 billion people in the world. The world wars would be closer to 3 percent of the world population at that time. But that does not compare with 50 percent of the world’s population.

4. “if those days had not been cut short, no one would survive . . .”  
(24:22).

But these signs stand in obvious contrast to the perspective of 24:36–44. The theme of “not knowing” recurs throughout verses 36–44 (and through 25:13) and is set in full contrast with the fact that the disciples can “know that he is near” (v. 33 ESV).<sup>25</sup>

“But of that day and hour *no one knows*” (*oudeis oiden*, v. 36)

“and *did not know*” (*ouk egnōsan*, v. 39 NKJV)

“you *do not know*” (*ouk oidate*, v. 42)

“if the head of the house *had known*” (*ēdei*, v. 43)

“when you *do not think*” (*ou dokeite*, v. 44)<sup>26</sup>

Pretribulationists have regularly argued—rightfully so—that no signs precede the rapture/day of the Lord, but many signs precede the second coming.<sup>27</sup> This argument supports viewing the rapture in verses 36–44. The latter verses describe the imminent, unpredictable coming of the day of the Lord and the accompanying pretribulational rapture. Therefore, at verse 36, the Lord answers the first question of the disciples (v. 3) about *when* the end time events will commence. Here Jesus reveals that the inception of the day of the Lord itself and the accompanying pretribulational rapture cannot be known.<sup>28</sup>

To explain the seeming contradiction between the signs of verses 4–31 and the imminence portrayed in verses 36–44, both pretribulationists<sup>29</sup> and posttribulationists<sup>30</sup> have often reverted to a theory labeled

<sup>25</sup>Gibbs adds, “In the first half of the discourse, ‘the one who is in the field’ (24:18) is warned not to turn back to get his cloak. In the second half of the discourse, there will be no warning for the two people in the field (24:40).” Gibbs, *Jesus and Parousia*, 224 n. 21.

<sup>26</sup>Nolland calls the phrase “do not think” a weaker form of “do not know” in v. 39. John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 995.

<sup>27</sup>As Thomas correctly reasons, “If signs must occur before His coming, His coming is not imminent.” Robert L. Thomas, “Imminence in the NT, Especially Paul’s Thessalonian Epistles,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 13 (fall 2002): 193.

<sup>28</sup>When Jesus said, “But of that day and hour no one knows,” He uses a metonymy of adjunct for subject. The “day and hour” (subject) is put for the “coming (timing) of the day and hour” (adjunct). No one knows *when* “that day” comes.

<sup>29</sup>John F. Walvoord, “Christ’s Olivet Discourse on the Time of the End: Part IV: How Near Is the Lord’s Return?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (January–March 1972): 25.

<sup>30</sup>Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 42–43.

“general predictability with specific unpredictability,” i.e., the time may be known generally but not precisely.<sup>31</sup> This is unhelpful in that it does not remove the contradiction between knowing and not knowing the time of the Lord’s return. Many commentators criticize such an idea as insufficient to explain the text.<sup>32</sup>

Premillennialists such as Carson and Blomberg escape the impasse of verse 36 by suggesting that the events of Matthew 24:4–28 span the interadvent age and have now been sufficiently fulfilled. Therefore, the time of Christ’s return is incalculable since there are no specific unfulfilled prophecies that precede the Parousia.<sup>33</sup> If verses 4–28 describe the interadvent age and not Daniel’s seventieth seven, the word “immediately” that begins verse 29 (“immediately [*eutheōs*] after the tribulation of those days”) becomes meaningless. Jesus could have simply said, “After the tribulation of those days . . . .”<sup>34</sup>

Moo concludes, “There is no basis for any transition from the posttribulational aspect of the Parousia in Matthew 24:31–35 (or –36) to its pretribulational aspect in verses 36ff. Therefore, all interpreters . . . face the difficulty of explaining how an advent heralded by specific signs can yet be one of which it is said, ‘no one knows the day and

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<sup>31</sup> Prewrath advocates suggest the seventieth seven is cut short making the time of His return unknown. Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 108–12; Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 42–43.

<sup>32</sup> “Moreover it is ridiculous quibbling divorced from the context to say that though the day and hour remain unknown, we [can] ascertain the year or month.” Carson, “Matthew,” 8:508. “Hence, Christians who claim they can narrow down the time of Christ’s return to a generation or a year or even a few days’ period, while still not knowing the literal day or hour, remain singularly ill-informed.” Blomberg, *Matthew*, 365. Cf. also Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 716; Osborne, *Matthew*, 903 n. 3.

<sup>33</sup> Carson, “Matthew,” 8:490, 495; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 370.

<sup>34</sup> “It is very difficult to believe that the words ‘immediately after the tribulation of those days’ refer only to something general in the indeterminate future. Rather than something vague, the words seem to require a specific antecedent (note both the definite article τήν [*tēn*, “the”] and the demonstrative pronoun ἐκεινῶν [*ekeinōn*, “those”]). The only specific item in the preceding context that could correspond to ‘the suffering of those days’ is the desecration of the temple referred to in v. 15.” Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 712. Hagner’s comment is helpful. But the parousia does not come “immediately after” the desecration of the temple in v. 15. The antecedent to “immediately after the tribulation of those days” includes all the elements described in vv. 15–28, climaxing in the near extinction of the human race (v. 22).

hour” (italics original).<sup>35</sup> If, on the other hand, it can be shown that a transition does exist at verse 36, then Jesus may be moving from a posttribulational aspect of His parousia to a pretribulational aspect of His return.

## Reason #2: The Introductory *peri de*.

When Jesus said that no one knows that day and hour except the Father alone,<sup>36</sup> Matthew records the introduction of the statement with *peri de* (“now concerning”).<sup>37</sup> It is well established that when *peri de* stands absolutely at the beginning of a sentence (and followed by the genitive), it marks a new section of thought that reaches back to previous material, often to resume an unanswered or unspoken question.<sup>38</sup> Pretribulationists have noticed the *peri de* construction in 1 Thessaloni-

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<sup>35</sup> Moo, “Posttribulation Rapture,” 209; *Ibid.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 237.

<sup>36</sup> The phrase “nor the Son” (*oude ho huios*) is found in the Markan Synoptic parallel at 13:32. Therefore, Jesus declared His own human ignorance of “that day and hour.” If Matt. 24:36 specifies the same event as 24:29–31, it seems strange that He would exclude Himself from knowing the day and hour of His second coming, given the chronological details of vv. 4–30a that He Himself predicted and therefore understood better than anyone.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew uses *peri de* four times; two are followed by the accusative (20:6; 27:46), and two by the genitive (22:31; 24:36). Mark uses the phrase with the genitive in 12:26; 13:32, which are parallel to Matt. 22:31 and 24:36 respectively. Note that the transitional nature of *peri de* in Matt. 24:36 also applies in the parallel, Mark 13:32. Paul uses the phrase eight times (1 Cor 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12; 1 Thess. 4:9; 5:1), all in the genitive. These Pauline uses are widely held by commentators as introducing a slightly new subject or making a transition in material.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Gibbs, *Jesus and Parousia*, 172–74. “‘But about . . .’ (*peri de*) occurred similarly in 22:31 to mark a change of subject . . . Paul uses the same phrase several times in 1 Corinthians (7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12) to move from one of the issues raised by his correspondents to another (cf. also 1 Thess. 4:9; 5:1; Acts 21:25). In each case *peri de* is the rhetorical formula for a new beginning. The analogy with 1 Corinthians indicates that here [Matt. 24:36] the phrase marks the transition from the first of the two questions asked in v. 3 to the second.” R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Accordance electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 936–937. In footnote 27, France states, “Cf. also the use of *περι δε* [*peri de*] to introduce a new subject in *Did.* 6:3; 7:1; 9:1; 11:3 . . .” *Ibid.*, 967. France misses the chiasmic structure and does not understand the questions are treated in reverse order.

France sees a similar “marked change of subject in [Mark 13:]32,” the parallel to Matt. 24:36. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Accordance electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), n.p.

ans 5:1. This precise construction is recognized as introducing a slightly new yet complementary subject with the 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 presentation of the pretribulational rapture.<sup>39</sup> Although *peri de* introduces a slightly new subject at 1 Thessalonians 5:1, it also carries on the eschatological concerns of 4:13–18.<sup>40</sup> The identical perspective may be true with the *peri de* of Matthew 24:36.<sup>41</sup>

Regarding *peri de* at the beginning of 24:36, Gibbs remarks, “Virtually none of the commentators has picked up on the structural function of these words.”<sup>42</sup> Blaising,<sup>43</sup> Fruchtenbaum,<sup>44</sup> and Thomas are a few pretribulationist who have noted this transition with *peri de* at Matthew 24:36. Thomas writes, “The δέ (*de*) that begins v. 36 must be transitional because the thirty-sixth verse changes the discussion of signs preceding the coming to emphasize that no signs will precede the *parousia*. Περὶ δέ [*Peri de*, 24:36] is a frequent device for introducing a

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<sup>39</sup> Ryrie notes the use of this prepositional construction to mark a new subject in 1 Thessalonians 4. Charles C. Ryrie, “*The Church and the Tribulation: A Review*,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131 (1974): 175. For further insight on this construction and its effect on pretribulational exegesis in 1 Thess., see Zane C. Hodges, “1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 and the Rapture,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 6 (October–December 2000): 25 n. 10.

Those who see the *peri de* construction in 1 Thessalonians as beginning a new subject include D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians* (NAC 33; ed. E. Ray Clendenen; Accordance electronic ed. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 133, 156.

<sup>40</sup> “With the perplexity about the dead in Christ resolved, Paul turns to a new subject (cf. *peri de*, ‘now about’) yet not one completely distinct from the previous one.” Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” 280.

<sup>41</sup> V. 36 goes better thematically with the following than with the preceding material, forming a well-knit unit. Cf. Nolland, *Matthew*, 990, 991, 993; Carson, “Matthew,” 8:507. Lambrecht observes that v. 36 matches the subject of v. 44 and forms a frame (or inclusio) for the unit. Lambrecht, “Parousia Discourse,” 327.

<sup>42</sup> Gibbs, *Jesus and Parousia*, 172. But Gibbs does acknowledge my dissertation on Matt. 24 in a footnote on this point, “Only Hart, ‘Chronology,’ 228–29 [“A Chronology of Matthew 24:1–44”] (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1986), notices a significance to ‘but concerning’ at 24:36. He says that it “marks a new section of thought.” *Ibid.*, 224 n. 29.

To be fair to the commentators, one should note that Gibbs wrote his dissertation in 1994, and it was not published until 2000. As noted in this article, several other commentators have now seriously considered the significance of *peri de* in Matt. 24:36.

<sup>43</sup> Blaising, “Pretribulation Rapture,” 48.

<sup>44</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, rev. ed. (San Antonio: Ariel Press, 2011), 640–41.

change from one phase of a subject to another phase of the same subject or from one subject to another subject (cf. Matt. 22:31; Mark 12:26; 13:32; Acts 21:25; 1 Cor. 7:1; 7:25 [sic]; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1,12; 1 Thess. 4:9, 13; 5:1).<sup>45</sup> In other words, the “coming” (*parousia*) of 24:37 may reference the rapture, not the second coming.

Waterman has also observed the use of *peri de* in Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 5. In the latter passage, Paul said that no one at Thessalonica needed to be informed about the times and seasons “because they knew perfectly well that the time of the Lord’s coming was unknown (1 Thess. 5:1–2). A different expression, but one with the same meaning, was used by Jesus, ‘but concerning that day and hour . . . no one knows’ (Mt. 24:36). Since Jesus introduces this remark by the use of *peri de*, it may very well be that Paul uses these words in 1 Thessalonians 5:1 . . . because Jesus used them.”<sup>46</sup>

Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 4–5 follow a similar pattern. In 1 Thessalonians 4–5, Paul transitions with *peri de* from what the Thessalonians do not know to what they do know about the rapture/day of the Lord. The reverse is true of Matthew 24. Jesus transitions from what the disciples can know (24:4–35) to what they cannot know (24:36–44). How *peri de* functions in parallel between 1 Thessalonians 5:1 and Matthew 24:36 is diagrammed below.

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas, “Imminence in the NT,” 193–94 n. 8. For further support of the transitional nature of *peri de*, see M. J. Harris, “Appendix: Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 3:1203.

<sup>46</sup> G. Henry Waterman, “The Source of Paul’s Teaching on the 2nd Coming of Christ in 1 and 2 Thessalonians,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 18 (spring 1975): 109. “Chapter 5 [of 1 Thess.] describes the end times in terms reminiscent of the signs of the times predicated in the Olivet Discourse.” J. Daniel Hays, J. Scott Duvall, C. Marvin Pate, “Thessalonians, 1 and 2,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and End Times* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 442.

## 1 Thessalonians 4–5

Lack of Knowledge: What the Thessalonians Do Not Know (1 Thess. 4:13–18)

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep . . .” (4:13)

Knowledge [peri de]: What the Thessalonians Know (1 Thess. 5:1–10)

“Now concerning [peri de] the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you” (5:1)

## Matthew 24

Knowledge: What the Disciples Can Know (Matt. 24:4–31)

“but that is not yet the end.” (v. 6)

“then the end will come” (v. 14)

“immediately after the tribulation of those days” (v 29)

“you know that summer is near” (v 32)

“you know that he is near, at the very gates” (v 33 ESV)

Lack of knowledge [peri de]: What the Disciples Cannot Know (24:36–44)

“But [peri de] of that day and hour no one knows” (v 36)

“they knew nothing until the flood came” (v 39 NET)

“if the head of the house had known” (v 43)

“the master . . . will come . . . at an hour which he does not know” (v 50)

Hagner understands Matthew 24:4–35 describe the interadvent age. Nevertheless, he comes very close to interpreting 24:36 in a manner similar to this paper, with a strong transition at verse 36 using *peri de* that carries the reader back to the first of the two questions of the disciples in verse 3.

In very strong contrast to the emphasis in v. 33 concerning what *can* be known . . . the present verse clearly indicates the *impossibility* of knowing the time of the Son of Man’s coming and the end of the age in advance of their actual occurrence (cf. the question of v. 3 concerning πότε [*pote*], “when,” these events would occur)” (italics original).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* (WBC 33B; Accordance/Thomas Nelson electronic ed. Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 716.

### Reason #3: “That Day and Hour”<sup>48</sup>

The *peri de* of verse 36 is followed by the phrase, “that day and hour.” If this phrase refers to the arrival of the day of the Lord as Paul defined it in 1 Thessalonians 5, then the coming of “that day and hour” is coterminous with the pretribulation rapture.<sup>49</sup> One should note that up to this point in the Discourse, only the phrase “those days” (plural) has been used (24:19, 22, 29). At verse 36, Jesus changes to “that day” (singular).<sup>50</sup> A clear inference is given that a new and distinct “day” is being described.<sup>51</sup>

Many commentators correctly identify “that day” as the events of the great day of Yahweh often referred to in the Old Testament prophets, i.e., the Old Testament day of the Lord.<sup>52</sup> The demonstrative (“*that* day”) confirms the Old Testament background.<sup>53</sup> This NT word as it

<sup>48</sup> Matt. 24:36 is the only reference to the phrase “that day and hour.” Marks uses, “but of that day *or* hour” (italics added, Mark 13:32). Matt. 24:50 shows that “day” and “hour” (they are treated literally within the parable) are different periods of time (the parallelism does not require the words to be identical), with “day” being the longer period and “hour” being a shorter period. If “day” is a broader term, then Mark destroys general predictability and specific unpredictability. Matthew’s purpose in using both “day” and “hour” is to intensify the unpredictability of the coming of the Lord. A heightened sense of unpredictability is also the reason for the repetition in Matt. 24:50 and Luke 12:46, which both use “day” and “hour” in different clauses.

<sup>49</sup> As well as the phrase “pretribulation rapture,” Blaising also uses the phrase “inaugural day of the Lord’s rapture.” Blaising, “Pretribulation Rapture,” 54.

<sup>50</sup> In vv. 37–38, Jesus will use the plural again, but only referencing the “days of Noah” and the “days before the flood.”

<sup>51</sup> R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1971), 232; J. A. O’Flynn, “The Eschatological Discourse,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 18 (1951): 280–81.

<sup>52</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 365; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 3:378; Desmond Ford, *The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology* (Washington: University Press of America, 1979), 65; David L. Turner, “The Gospel of Matthew,” *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, Philip W. Comfort, gen. ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2005), 319. See the following passages where “that day” specifically occurs with the phrase “day of the Lord” in the New American Standard Bible: Eze. 30:3, 9; Joel 3:14, 18; Zeph. 1:7–15.

<sup>53</sup> Arthur L. Moore, *The Parousia in the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 99–100. Moore, however, believes that Jesus taught in 24:36 that no one knew the

relates to the OT day of the Lord portrays an imminent event.<sup>54</sup> Paul uses “day” (*hēmera*) for the imminent day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 5:4. “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day [*hēmera*] would overtake you like a thief.” Once again, Paul’s use of “day” here is likely borrowed from the Lord’s use in Matthew 24.<sup>55</sup>

A similar eschatological significance can be attributed to the word *hōra* (“hour”). In Revelation 3:10, where the church is promised to be kept from the “hour of testing,” *hōra* has reference to the future tribulation period and therefore to the day of the Lord.<sup>56</sup>

All of these evidences confirm the case that the day of the Lord/parousia is in view in verse 36. Thomas concludes, “In other words, 24:36 speaks of a different arrival from the arrival signaled by ‘all these things,’ twice referred to in connection with the parable of the fig tree in 24:32–34. After 24:36 Jesus looks at the events of Daniel’s seventieth week as a whole and how the beginning of that week will catch everyone by surprise . . . .”<sup>57</sup>

nature of the day of the Lord. This is impossible since the Old and New Testaments everywhere describe the nature of the day of the Lord. The context makes it clear that Jesus has in mind the time at which the day of the Lord will come.

<sup>54</sup> C. Brown, “*hēmera*,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 2:891, where the following references are cited: Isaiah 10:27; 27:1; 29:19; Haggai 2:23; Zechariah 6:10.

<sup>55</sup> Waterman, “Source of Paul’s Teaching,” 109.

<sup>56</sup> In the NIV, NASV, ESV, or NET, *hōra* is translated “[at that (very), that, for a] moment,” or “at once” in Matt. 8:13; 9:22; 17:18; 26:55; Luke 2:38; 12:12; 24:33; Acts 16:18, 33; 22:13; Gal. 2:5. This rendering would not be inappropriate for Matt. 24:44b, “for the Son of Man is coming at an hour [moment] when you do not think He will.” The NET note 62 on Matt. 24:44 states, “Jesus made clear that his coming could not be timed, and suggested it would take some time—so long, in fact, that some will not be looking for him any longer (at an hour when you do not expect him).” This meaning appears self-contradictory. If Jesus was intimating that He would not come back for a long time, then at an earlier time the disciples can rightfully *not* expect Him. Yet Jesus had just declared that it is during such a time that He will come. Also, if the phrase “is coming at an hour when you do not think” means Jesus will not come for a long time, the end result is a denial of imminence for the eleven disciples. Such an approach contradicts the thief in the night imagery that portrays an any-moment return of the Master. The real exhortation of the passage is to be “ready” (v. 44a) at all times, and to “think” or “suppose” (δοκέω, v. 44b) that Jesus might come at any time. The verse means only that the Master “will come at a time you don’t know” (CEB).

<sup>57</sup> Thomas, “Imminence in the NT,” 194. Thomas, however, does not say that Jesus is speaking of the rapture—only that He is speaking of the day of the Lord.

#### Reason #4: The “Days of Noah” Illustration (verses 37–39)

In Matthew 24:37–39, Jesus illustrated and elaborated verse 36. The coming of “that day and hour” will be like the “days of Noah”<sup>58</sup> in which people “were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark.” The lifestyles depicted are those that have existed in every generation since the earliest days of human history (Noah). This implies an emphasis on the normalcy and indifference prior to the day of the Lord.<sup>59</sup> The illustration that follows verses 37–39 about two men working in the field and two women grinding at the mill (vv. 41–42) also argues for the stress on normalcy in the passage. Many commentators simply believe that the ordinary life patterns described in the Noahic illustration can coexist with the colossal distresses that run their course prior to Christ’s second coming.<sup>60</sup>

But if “the days of Noah” illustrate the days that climax the tribulation period, an apparent contradiction results. How can a “business-as-usual” attitude toward life exist at the precise time when the tribulation judgments are being poured out in all their intensity.<sup>61</sup> Instead, the most

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<sup>58</sup> In the Noahic analogy of the OD, the Greek formula *hōsper* (“just as”) . . . *houtōs* (“so also”) (Matt. 24:37, 38–39) may be intended to disclose a type-antitype (Noah-Christ) relationship such as is found in Matt. 12:40 (Jonah-Christ) and Rom 5:12, 19 (Adam-Christ). Osborne refers to this as “a type of Alpha (beginning) and Omega (end) comparison.” Osborne, *Matthew*, 904.

<sup>59</sup> Bruner comments, “The crime indicated by Jesus in this verse is not *gross sin* (the people of Noah’s generation are not doing vicious things in Jesus’ description); it is *secular indifference*. The evil here is immersion in the everyday without thought for the Last Day” (italics original). Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew, A Commentary: Volume 2: The Churchbook: Matthew 13–28* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 524. Of course, Genesis records gross sin in Noah’s day, specifically that the earth was “filled with violence” (Gen 6:11, 13). Davies and Allison suggest that “eating and drinking” and “marrying and giving in marriage” may carry pejorative connotations. The former recalls the drunkenness following the flood (Gen 9:20–21) and the latter brings to mind the sin of the sons of God in Gen 6:4. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:380 n. 46. Matt. 24:49 describes the evil slave as one who “begins to . . . eat and drink with drunkards.”

<sup>60</sup> Blomberg, *Matthew*, 366; Carson, “Matthew,” 8:509; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:381; Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 719–20; Bruner, *Matthew: The Churchbook*, 524.

<sup>61</sup> In the Lukan parallel to Matt. 24 (Luke 21), the verse that immediately precedes the statement that men “will see the son of man coming in a cloud with power

transparent meaning of the “days of Noah” illustration (vv. 37–39) is that, just as normal but unsuspecting lifestyles existed prior to the great judgment of the flood,<sup>62</sup> so too normal but unsuspecting lifestyles will exist prior to the sudden onslaught of the day of the Lord judgments.<sup>63</sup>

In the Noah parallel, the people “knew nothing” (v. 39 NIV, NET; *ouk egnōsan*) about what was soon to happen until the flood came and took them all away.<sup>64</sup> If the flood judgment illustrates a judgment that takes place at the return of Christ “immediately after the tribulation of those days” (v. 29), can it be said that the world will understand *nothing* of this coming destruction?

At the sixth seal judgment, people know fully that the wrath of God has come. They cry out to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” (Rev. 6:16–17).<sup>65</sup> The calamities that precede the second coming of Christ will be so severe that the human race will be close to extinction apart from the Lord’s intervention (Matt. 24:22).<sup>66</sup> Would Jesus use a description of casual lifestyles in Matthew 24:37–39 to communicate what the world would be like when “there will be a great tribulation, such as has not

and great glory” (v. 27), Jesus comments, “men [will be] fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world . . .” (Luke 21:26). This is not life as usual.

<sup>62</sup> Emphasizing the stress on a normal lifestyle, cf. Osborne, *Matthew*, 904. Contradicting the element of normalcy, cf. Gundry. “But are we to think that people in the tribulation will stop eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage? The emphasis in the words of Jesus does not fall upon a normal condition of life, but upon the unexpected suddenness of His advent to those who will be engaged otherwise than in watching for Him.” Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 202.

<sup>63</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, rev. ed., 641.

<sup>64</sup> Walvoord appeals to the theory of general predictability with specific unpredictability. Instead of the ungodly “knowing nothing,” he suggests that they could know that the flood was not coming because observers could see that Noah had not finished the ark and loaded all the animals. When these were finished, then observers “could have sensed that the flood was drawing near, although they could not know the day or the hour.” Walvoord, “Christ’s Olivet Discourse: Part IV,” 38.

<sup>65</sup> “At the time Noah received his message from God, there was no sign of the Flood and related events.” Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 12:116.

<sup>66</sup> J. F. Strombeck, *First the Rapture* (Moline, IL: Strombeck Agency, 1950), 69, comments, “There can be no complacency nor unexpected destruction after the most terrible destruction of all time has begun.”

occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall” (Matt. 24:21)? This seems most unlikely.

Therefore, we conclude that the Noahic flood more likely corresponds to the time leading up to the sudden arrival of the day of the Lord and the seventieth seven (week) of Daniel.<sup>67</sup>

### **Reason #5: Harmony of the OD and the Teachings of Paul**

Posttribulationists have rightly argued for the interconnection of Paul’s teaching on the parousia and that of the Lord’s teaching in the OD.<sup>68</sup> First, there is a striking resemblance between one taken from the field or from the mill (Matt. 24:40–41) with Paul’s teaching of the rapture (1 Thess. 4:15–18). Also, Christ’s Noahic illustration and Paul’s concept of the day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 5 certainly hint at this agreement. The similarities of thought are convincing evidence that the source of Paul’s teaching was the OD.<sup>69</sup> Kim notes the strong parallels between Jesus’ teachings and 1 Thessalonians 5:2–7. In observing a series of phrases in 1 Thessalonians 4–5, he concludes, “So the formulas, ‘in the word of the Lord’ [1 Thess. 4:15] and ‘you yourselves know accurately’ [1 Thess. 5:2], which follow each other so closely in the wake of Paul’s reminder of his previous instructions ‘through the Lord Jesus’ (1 Thess. 4:2), both indicate that in 1 Thess. 4:15–5:7 Paul is alluding to the eschatological teachings of Jesus.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> “He [Christ] used the coming of the flood in Noah’s day and the destruction of Sodom in Lot’s day as examples of His imminent return (Luke 17:22–37).” Thomas, “Imminence in the NT,” 193.

<sup>68</sup> Note the chart on the parallels between Matt. 24 and 1 Thess. 4–5 in G. K. Beale, *1–2 Thessalonians*, ed. Grant R. Osborne, IVP NT Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: IV Press, 2003), 137.

<sup>69</sup> G. Henry Waterman, “The Source of Paul’s Teaching on the 2nd Coming of Christ in 1 and 2 Thessalonians,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 18 (spring 1975): 106–7. Thomas believes that the origin of all teaching about imminence in the NT can be found in Christ. Thomas, “Imminence in the NT,” 192, 198. Hodges develops this perspective further, proposing that both Paul (1 Thess. 4–5) and Peter (2 Pet. 3) derived their teaching about the day of the Lord, the thief in the night, and the new revelation of the rapture from this passage in the OD. Zane C. Hodges, *Jesus, God’s Prophet: His Teaching about the Coming Surprise* (Mesquite, TX: Kerugma, 2006), 27–30. Blomberg (*Matthew*, 367) implies that John (Rev. 3:3; 16:15) also picked up his use of the thief imagery from Jesus in Matt. 24.

<sup>70</sup> Seyoon Kim, “Jesus, Sayings of,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 477.

If this is the case, Paul and Jesus must be dealing with very similar eschatological concerns.<sup>71</sup> For Paul, the sudden arrival of the day of the Lord will be preceded by a time of “peace and safety” (1 Thess. 5:1–3). Once the day of the Lord begins, unexpected destruction begins for the unbeliever. The believer, whether alert for the Lord’s return or not, will be delivered from that wrath by the rapture (1 Thess. 5:9–10).<sup>72</sup> Pretribulationists appropriately recognize that Paul’s teaching of a peaceful and secure world that precedes the day of the Lord cannot easily be harmonized with John’s portrait of the end of the tribulation when the world will gather its armies in war against the coming Christ (Rev. 16:13–16; 19:19). Paul’s “peace and safety” is an indicator both of when the day of the Lord will come as well as when the church saints will be delivered from that day by rapture. Both must be before or at the very inception of the tribulation. If the day of the Lord comes unexpectedly at a time of “peace and safety,” then the rapture also comes at a time of “peace and safety.”

This Pauline scenario—that the day of the Lord will come suddenly at a time of “peace and safety”—is quite comparable to the descriptions found in Matthew 24:39 (“they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage”).<sup>73</sup> In the Lord’s illustration, the days of Noah were primarily the days before (*pro*, v. 38) the judgment of the flood when life continued as normal. During the tribulation, the very existence of all life will be in such jeopardy (Matt. 24:22) that the tranquility of life described in Matthew 24:37–39 could hardly take place. Therefore, the Noah illustration taught by Jesus admirably portrays the universal, surprise arrival of the day of the Lord as taught by Paul.

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“[T]he declaration of [1 Thess. 4:]15–17 corresponds in many respects with Matt. 24.29–31, 40–41, thus making it possible that Jesus’ eschatological discourse was the source of this instruction.” Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (PNTC; Accordance electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 222. Cf. also Beale, *1–2 Thessalonians*, 135 (footnote on 4:15), 137–38.

<sup>71</sup> This conclusion would go against Turner’s thought that “Jesus’ language does not approximate a distinction between a pretribulation rapture and a posttribulation coming of Jesus to earth, as Paul arguably does (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 2 Thess. 1:6–10).” Turner, *Matthew*, 590.

<sup>72</sup> Zane C. Hodges, “1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 and the Rapture,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 6 (October–December 2000): 31–32.

<sup>73</sup> Waterman, “Source of Paul’s Teaching,” 110.

## Reason #6: Harmony of the OD and the Teachings of Peter

It seems apparent that the Lord's words in the OD have given rise to the 1 and 2 Peter references to Noah. The exact phrase, "days of Noah" found in Matthew 24:37 (par. Luke 17:26), also appears in 1 Peter 3:20. In the following verse (1 Pet. 3:21), the word *antitypos* ("corresponding to, antitype") appears and establishes an unquestionable typological view of the flood.

The NIV supplies the word "water" in its translation of 1 Peter 3:21, "this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you." The NASB is more in keeping with the vagueness of the Greek, "Corresponding to that [*ho*], baptism now saves you." The interpretive question is: To what does the relative pronoun *ho* refer? Nearly all commentators are persuaded that "water" (*hydatos*) in the previous verse is the antecedent. This is grammatically sound. The relative *ho* is neuter and agrees with *hydatos* ("water").

However, the water did not save Noah and his family but was instead an instrument of divine judgment. The ark saved Noah. Heb 11:7 is clear on the matter: "By faith Noah . . . prepared an ark for the salvation of his household." The relative pronoun in 1 Peter 3:21 makes reference indirectly to the word "ark" (*kibōtou*) in the previous verse, not to "water" (*hydatos*).<sup>74</sup> If the type is the ark<sup>75</sup> and not the water of the flood, neither is the antitype (*antitypos*) water baptism. In context, a strong case can be made that the antitype is better taken as Spirit baptism,<sup>76</sup> which places believers into the invisible church, the body of

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<sup>74</sup> The Greek grammar is complex. The verse reads, "which antitype also now saves you, that is baptism." I would contend that the presence of *ho*, the neuter relative pronoun, is attracted to the gender of *antitypos*, and ultimately to the neuter, *baptisma*, which is in apposition to *antitypos*. Therefore, the neuter does not identify grammatically the antecedent (type) but the descendant (antitype).

<sup>75</sup> "Such 'typological' shaping of the Flood narrative by the author of the Pentateuch is remarkably similar to the later reading of this passage in 1 Pet. 3:21. In that passage *the ark* [italics added] is seen to prefigure the saving work of Christ as it is pictured in NT baptism." John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 2:85.

<sup>76</sup> In 1 Peter 3:16, Peter leads into the 3:18–21 context by using Paul's technical term *en christō* ("in Christ"), which takes place only through Spirit baptism. Outside of Paul's seventy-three uses of the term, it is found only in 1 Peter (3:16; 5:10, 14).

Christ. In other words, for Peter, Noah's entrance into the ark is a type of believers entering the invisible church by means of Spirit baptism.<sup>77</sup>

Since the apostle Paul declared that the church is delivered by rapture before the tribulation wrath (1 Thess. 5:9–10; cf. Rev. 3:10), and in Peter's typology the ark represents the church (i.e., everyone who is joined to Christ by Spirit baptism), then the deliverance of Noah and his family in the ark logically typify the pretribulation rapture of the church and deliverance from the coming day of the Lord.<sup>78</sup> Even if this interpretation of 1 Peter 3:20–21 is rejected, pretribulationists must accept the fact that in this passage Noah and the flood biblically typify something relevant for first-century readers as members of the NT church, not something relevant for Israel in the tribulation.

Eschatology is a major theme in 2 Peter (cf. 1:16–21; 3:3–13). Peter is quite aware of the teachings of Paul's letters (2 Pet. 3:15–16) and would therefore understand Paul's teachings on the day of the Lord and the rapture. It is in the immediately preceding context of his remark about Paul's epistles that Peter himself directly mentions the thieflike arrival of the day of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:10). Undoubtedly, Peter is drawing from Jesus' teachings in the OD (and perhaps Paul's teaching in 1 Thessalonians). Peter had personally heard Jesus' message on the Mount of Olives.

In 2 Peter 3, the apostle mentions the flood (v 6). False teachers will ridicule the parousia of Christ and the promise of Christ's return (2 Pet. 3:3–4). Their mocking is based on the fact that life will proceed without any evidence of divine intervention (v 4). This is similar to Jesus' teachings in the OD about the days of Noah (Matt. 24:37–39) and

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<sup>77</sup> For a defense of this position, see John F. Hart, "Should Pretribulationists Reconsider the Rapture in Matthew 24:36–44? Part 2 of 3," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 21 (spring 2008): 59–62. Typological interpretation of Noah and the ark was developed to an unbiblical extreme in the third century and later. The ark and all its details, even its measurements, were allegorized. For details of church fathers and their typological treatment of the flood, see Lewis, *Noah and the Flood in Jewish and Christian Literature*, 156–80. Such unbiblical extremes are not a substantial reason for rejecting Peter's typology: the ark is a type of the invisible church that is entered by Spirit baptism.

<sup>78</sup> When Peter says that Spirit baptism "now saves you" (1 Peter 3:21), other meanings for *sōzō* ("save") besides justification-salvation are possible. However, Peter does not seem to have in mind Paul's salvation from wrath by rapture (1 Thess. 5:9–10) unless it is by indirect reference.

Paul's teaching that peace and safety will precede the sudden destruction of the day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:3). But what the false teachers have purposefully neglected (*lanthanei gar autous touto thelontas*, lit., "for this escapes them [and they are] willing," v 5) is the flood of Noah's day (2 Pet. 3:5–6).

In 2 Peter 2, Peter links the flood to the eschatological judgment of the day of the Lord (2 Pet. 2:4–9). Of interest is the phrase in 2 Peter 2:9 concerning God's rescue of the righteous from "tribulation" (*ek peirasmou rhyesthai*). This phrase suggests the rapture of Revelation 3:10 where believers are kept "from the hour of trial" (*ek tēs hōras tou peirasmou*). Edgar writes about 2 Peter 2:9 in its context.

The word Peter uses in v 9 is *peirasmou*, the same word which occurs in Rev. 3:10 . . . . It is clear that "trial," *peirasmou*, does not mean everyday, routine trials. The trials described are the universal flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The flood was a judgment of God on the entire world. It was a physical judgment, not eternal judgment. This parallels the tribulation period and is described by the same term (*peirasmou*) . . . . The statement that God knows to deliver from "trial," *peirasmou*, must mean from times of physical trial intended for the ungodly, a description which fits the tribulation period . . . . Neither Noah nor Lot went through the trial as did the ungodly . . . . Noah was in the ark before the flood started. He did not remain somehow to be protected miraculously through the flood. Both Noah and Lot were spared the "trial" . . . . Gundry attempts to avoid the significance of this verse. He states that "Noah went through and emerged from the flood." But Noah did not swim in the waters for a time and eventually emerge by being fished out. Noah was placed in a physical, geographical place of safety. This is not significantly different from the church being in the air with the Lord and possibly over the earth during the tribulation period.<sup>79</sup>

What Edgar is suggesting is that the deliverance of Noah and Lot illustrates the rapture of the church before the day of the Lord.

In Peter's thinking, then, the judgment of the flood is thoroughly aligned with the time leading up to the imminent arrival of the day of the Lord (the seventieth seven of Daniel).<sup>80</sup> Can we not conclude from

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<sup>79</sup> Thomas R. Edgar, "Robert H. Gundry and Revelation 3:10," *Grace Theological Journal* 3 (spring 1982): 44–45. For the benefit of the English reader, Greek words in the quote have been transliterated.

<sup>80</sup> Though not writing from a pretribulational position, Bauckham's comment is appropriate: "Since the Flood and the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah are proto-

this that the imminent judgment of Noah's day described in Matthew 24:37–38 exceptionally parallels the imminent day of the Lord described by Paul and Peter in their epistles? If 2 Peter 2:9 and 1 Thessalonians 5:9 declare a deliverance from the day of the Lord by a pretribulational rapture for the church, and if Peter and Paul derived their teaching from the Lord in the OD, then in Matthew 24:38 Noah's deliverance from the universal judgment of the flood best pictures the church's deliverance by rapture before the great eschatological "flood," the day of the Lord.<sup>81</sup>

### **Reason #7: The Ones Taken and Left Behind (vv. 40–41)**

Most pretribulational scholars understand the word "taken" ("one will be taken," vv. 40–41) to refer to people taken in judgment at the end of the tribulation, not people taken in rapture before the tribulation.<sup>82</sup> This conclusion is drawn from the preceding context that says, "the flood came and took them all away" (v 39). While these scholars recognize that the Greek word for "took" in v 39 (*airō*) differs from the Greek word for "taken" in verses 40 and 41 (*paralambanō*), they insist that the "taking" in both cases is for judgment. In their thinking, the only possible rapture in verses 40–41 would be a posttribulational rapture, and a posttribulational rapture must be rejected based on other clear passages.

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types of eschatological judgment, the situations of Noah and Lot are typical of the situation of Christians in the final days before the Parousia." Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1983), 253.

<sup>81</sup> In Luke 17:26–28, the parallel to Matt. 24:37, Noah and Lot appear side by side just as in 2 Peter 2:5–8. The juxtaposition of the flood (Noah) and Sodom (Lot) is occasionally found in Jewish literature (Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1431 n. 15). But it is more likely that Peter is borrowing from Jesus' teaching in the OD than from Jewish traditional sources. For example, Sirach 16:7–8 parallels the "ancient giants who revolted" with the "neighbors of Lot" (NRSV), but the passage does not mention Noah by name or Lot directly. The Testament of Naphtali 3:4–5 juxtaposes Sodom and the Watchers who changed their nature (flood). But these references do not mention Lot or Noah by name, and Sodom is mentioned before the flood. The Wisdom of Solomon 10:4–7 mentions neither Noah nor Lot by name, and interpose the Tower of Babel (10:5) between the two judgments. Third Maccabees 2:4–5 set side by side the flood and Sodom, but again do not mention Noah and Lot by name.

<sup>82</sup> Walvoord, "Christ's Olivet Discourse, Part IV," 27–28; Feinberg, "Case for the Pretribulation Rapture," 230–31; Renald Showers, *Maranath: Our Lord Comes!* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1995), 179–80.

Posttribulationists, on the other hand, have no problem finding a rapture in Matthew 24:40–41. For them, however, the rapture in verses 40–41 must be one and the same with the second coming of Christ in verses 29–31, i.e., posttribulational. But posttribulational chronology of the Discourse overlooks the transitional nature of the *peri de* at v 36. If the transition is embraced, a pretribulational rapture in these verses becomes theologically and exegetically reasonable. The events of verses 36–44 are separated logically and contextually from the events of verses 29–31.

It was Jesus, not Paul, who first revealed the rapture of the church. As has been mentioned above, Paul’s teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4 originates with Jesus. Besides the brief teaching of the rapture in John 14:1–3, Matthew 24:37–44 contain the most likely teachings of Jesus on which Paul could have derived his own doctrine about the pretribulational rapture.<sup>83</sup>

In light of the transition at v 36, the reasons put forward by posttribulationists for seeing a rapture in verses 40–41 can now be turned in support of a pretribulational rapture. Gundry states,

Two different words appear for the action of taking, *airō* (v 39) and *paralambanō* (vv. 40, 41). The same word could easily have been employed had an exact parallel between the two takings been intended. Instead we have the employment of another word which only two days later describes the rapture (John 14:3) . . . The apostles would naturally have associated the two expressions. Jesus probably so intended, else He would have drawn a distinction . . . In light of this, the change from *airō* to *paralambanō* indicates a change in topic and connotation: the former term refers to judgment similar in unexpectedness to the Flood, the latter to reception of the saints at the rapture to be forever with their Lord (Cf. 1 Thess. 4:17; John 14:3).<sup>84</sup>

It is generally agreed that *paralambanō* carries the meaning, “to take to or with [oneself].” The thought is always one of accompani-

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<sup>83</sup> In Gundry’s view, the OD is the central portion of revelation on which his posttribulational doctrine is built. He argues that pretribulationists must look to other passages to demonstrate a pretribulation rapture. Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 129. This article contends that the pretribulational rapture teaching of Paul can also find its central portion of revelation in the OD.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

ment, usually in a positive sense, i.e., for close fellowship.<sup>85</sup> But of the forty-nine uses in the NT, Sproule has listed seven that may be used in an unfriendly way, five in Matthew (4:5, 8; 12:45; 27:27).<sup>86</sup> Burer narrows the list of negative uses in Matthew to one (27:27).<sup>87</sup>

So as always, context must be the final, determining factor. Some see the context in Matthew 24:39–41 to be focused on judgment. But this is only partially correct. The parousia is also mentioned in the context (vv. 37, 39) and either the one taken or the one left could satisfy the stress on judgment. In fact *aphiēmi* (“to leave,” vv. 40, 41) takes on the meaning of “abandon” in its recurrent use with personal objects in Matthew (Matt. 4:11, 22; 8:15; 13:36; 19:29; 22:22, 25; 26:56, etc.).<sup>88</sup> This impact of *aphiēmi* as it relates to personal objects is brought out in how a spouse might abandon his or her partner (1 Cor 7:11–13), how the Good Shepherd will not abandon His sheep (John 10:12), and how the Father has certainly not abandoned the Son (John 8:29). If these uses can be allowed to set the pattern, *aphiēmi* could hardly be used of what the Father or the Son do with believers at the final return of Christ to the earth.<sup>89</sup> Other than Matthew 24:40–41, there are no other passages in the NT that use *aphiēmi* to express what the Lord will do to believers (Jew or Gentile).<sup>90</sup> Just two days after the Discourse, Jesus used *aphiēmi* of what He would *not* do to the disciples: “I will not leave [*aphiēmi*] you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18).

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<sup>85</sup> Gerhard Delling, “*paralambanō*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:13; B. Siede, “*lambanō*,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 3:751.

<sup>86</sup> The others are Luke 11:26; John 19:16; Acts 23:18; John A. Sproule, “An Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism” (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1981), 60.

<sup>87</sup> Michael H. Burer, “Matthew 24:40–41 in the NET Bible Notes: Taken for Salvation or Judgment?” posted August 4, 2004, [http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page\\_id=1587](http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=1587).

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:383.

<sup>89</sup> Nolland remarks, “The potentially negative nuances of which ‘left’ (*aphiēmi*) is capable (‘left out’) make it more likely that being taken off to salvation is intended . . .” Nolland, *Matthew*, 994.

<sup>90</sup> *aphiēmi* is repeatedly used of Jesus and God forgiving (*aphiēmi*) the sins of believers. Here the thought is abandoning the judgment due our sins, and not abandoning us personally.

If the one “taken” is taken away for judgment, it is peculiar that a word characterized by personal accompaniment is employed while the one “left” to enter the kingdom is described with a word frequently used for the forsaken.<sup>91</sup>

A few pretribulationists have felt the weight of the natural sense of *aphiēmi* (“leave, abandon”) and *paralambanō* (“take along, take with”). Burer, a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and assistant editor for the New English Bible, does not commit to a pretribulationist rapture in Matthew 24. Nevertheless, he writes, “The imagery itself lends the most credence to the interpretation that those taken away are taken for salvation.”<sup>92</sup>

Glasscock, also a pretribulationist, puts forward the thought that the ones taken are believers, both Jews and Gentiles, who are gathered by the angels at the second coming of Christ described in 24:31. The ones left behind experience the judgments yet to come on the earth.<sup>93</sup> Where these believers are taken is not specified.

If the transitional nature of v 36 is allowed its full force, the one taken is not taken for salvation at the second coming of Christ. The simplest interpretation is to see in *paralambanō* (“taken”) a reference to the pretribulationist rapture of church saints. Two days after Jesus taught His Discourse on the Mount of Olives, He used *paralambanō* to depict the taking of believers in a pretribulationist rapture (John 14:3).<sup>94</sup> Why resist that inference in Matthew 24:40–41? Those abandoned are the unbelievers.<sup>95</sup> The judgments of the day of the Lord come on them and they do not escape (1 Thess. 5:3).

<sup>91</sup> Brown observes the use of *aphiēmi* in Matt. 23:38 for the judgment of the temple. He concludes that the uses of the word in 24:40–41 serve to warn those who are unprepared like in the days of Noah that they will be forsaken in judgment like the temple. Schuyler Brown, “The Matthean Apocalypse,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 4 (1979): 16.

<sup>92</sup> Burer, “Matthew 24:40–41 in the NET Bible Notes.”

<sup>93</sup> Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 476–77. Glasscock cites as his source Pate’s treatment of Luke 17:26–37. C. Marvin Pate, *Luke*, Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 332.

<sup>94</sup> Delling links *paralambanō* in Matt. 24:40–41 with John 14:3, taking both uses as an “acceptance into the kingdom of Christ.” Delling, “*paralambanō*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 4:13

<sup>95</sup> Partial rapturists interpret both those taken and those left as believers. D. M. Pantou, *Rapture* (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle, 1988), 16–24; Robert Govett, *The Prophecy on Olivet* (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle, 1985), 107–8. This hardly follows

## Reason #8: The Thief Imagery<sup>96</sup>

Matthew 24:42–44 contains a short parable concerning the thief (v. 43), framed by two similar exhortations to readiness or watchfulness (vv. 42, 44). Surprisingly, pretribulationists have not been consistent in interpreting the thief analogy in eschatological passages (Matt. 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thess. 5:2, 4; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15).<sup>97</sup> Sometimes it is viewed as leading to Christ's second coming (Matt. 24:43; Rev. 16:15) and at other times as announcing the imminent day of the Lord that immediately follows or is coterminous with the pretribulation rapture (2 Pet. 3:10; 1 Thess. 5:2, 4).<sup>98</sup>

Both pretribulationists<sup>99</sup> and posttribulationists<sup>100</sup> apply the Matthew passage to the second advent. The thief (at night) figure is found in several eschatological passages, 1 Thessalonians 5:2–4 and 2 Peter 3:10 being of capital importance for this study.<sup>101</sup> If the source of Paul's

the parallel of the Lord's parousia with the days of Noah (a separation of the righteous [believers] and unrighteous [unbelievers]). Cf. also, John Campbell, "The Word of Righteousness: The Rapture of the Saints (2)," *Affirmation and Critique* vol. 12 (April 2007): 78; accessed 12/1/11, at [www.affcrit.com/pdfs/2007/01/07\\_01\\_wr.pdf](http://www.affcrit.com/pdfs/2007/01/07_01_wr.pdf).

<sup>96</sup> Matt. 24:43 marks the second time Jesus used the thief imagery. The first is recorded in Luke 12:39, given just over three months before the OD.

<sup>97</sup> Thomas is to be commended for his consistency in applying the thief imagery in all passages to the imminent return of Christ. But he apparently sees the imagery as only illustrating Christ's coming in judgment for the unbeliever. Any emphasis on judgment in the thief imagery is more adequately developed from the surrounding context rather than from the figure itself. Judging is not a primary design of thieves, whereas the element of surprise is. Thomas, "Imminence in the NT." See also Thomas, "The 'Coming' of Christ in Revelation 2–3," 166–69. In Mark's parallel account (13:34–35), the thief analogy is replaced by the parable of a homeowner who unexpectedly returns from a journey. While the homeowner calls his servants to account, judgment is not the only possible focus. The homeowner can reward as well as punish.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 238.

<sup>99</sup> Walvoord, "Christ's Olivet Discourse: Part IV," 28–29; Thomas Ice, "(Part 35) An Interpretation of Matthew 24–25," *Pre-Trib Perspectives*, <http://www.pre-trib.org/article-view.php?id=241>.

<sup>100</sup> Moo, "Case for the Posttribulation Rapture," 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 185; Carson, "Matthew," 8:510.

<sup>101</sup> Second Peter 3:10 adds in the majority text *en nykti* ("in the night") following *kleptēs* ("thief") and therefore contains the identical phrase to that in 1 Thessalonians

teaching about the day of the Lord and the pretribulational rapture is Jesus' eschatological teachings in the OD, a case for a consistent interpretation between Matthew 24:42–44 and 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 is warranted.

Thomas remarks, "That both [the rapture and the day of the Lord] are any-moment possibilities is why Paul can talk about these two in successive paragraphs [i.e., 1 Thess. 4 and 5]. This is how the Lord's personal coming as well as the 'day's' coming can be compared to a thief (2 Pet. 3:4, 10; Rev. 3:3, 11; 16:15)." <sup>102</sup>

Concerning the thief analogy in 1 Thessalonians 5, Showers notes, "A thief depends upon the element of surprise for success. He does not give his intended victims a forewarning of his coming. Paul's point—the unsaved will be given no forewarning of the coming of the broad Day of the Lord—rules out any of the seals of Revelation as being forewarnings of the beginning of the broad Day [Daniel's seventieth seven]." <sup>103</sup>

One must ask why the thief imagery in Matthew 24:43 cannot also be interpreted by the same logic that pretribulationists like Showers apply to the thief imagery of 1 Thessalonians 5. Kim notes, "It is widely recognized that verses 2 and 4 [of 1 Thess. 5] echo Jesus' parable of the thief (Mt 24:43 par Lk 12:39), especially as the metaphor of thief is not applied in an eschatological context in the OT and Jewish literature." <sup>104</sup>

Paul, Peter, <sup>105</sup> and John have based their figure of the thief on the parable of Jesus. <sup>106</sup> What is also interesting is that Revelation 3:3 and

5:2. If this reading is accepted, Jesus (Matthew and Luke), Peter, and Paul all mention the thief-at-night figure.

<sup>102</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *1 Thessalonians* (EBC 11; ed. Frank E. Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas; Accordance electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), n.p.

<sup>103</sup> Showers, *Maranatha*, 60.

<sup>104</sup> Kim, "Jesus, Sayings of," 476.

<sup>105</sup> Peter's use of the thief imagery in 2 Peter 3 "is almost certainly related to the parable of the thief (Mt 24:43 par Lk 12:39), for the image of a thief is found only in early Christian writings." G. M. Stanton, "Jesus Traditions," *Dictionary of Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 570.

<sup>106</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S. H. Hooke (rev. ed., New York: Scribner, 1963), 50; C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner, 1961), 133; J. K. Howard, "Our Lord's Teaching Concerning His Parousia: A Study in the Gospel of Mark," *Evangelical Quarterly* 38 (1966): 155.

16:15 suggest Christ Himself comes as a thief, while 1 Thessalonians 5:4 makes it clear the day of the Lord comes as a thief. The impression is that the two events are simultaneous.

If we are to honor the surprise element resident in the thief analogy in 24:43, we must admit that it does not apply to the second coming. A thief does not willingly signal his presence, but numerous telltale signs will precede Christ's second coming at the climax of the tribulation.<sup>107</sup>

### **Reason #9: The Exhortation to “Watch”<sup>108</sup>**

There are twenty-three uses of the verb *grēgoreō* (“to watch, be alert, be awake”) in the NT. It appears first in the NT on the lips of Jesus (canonically first in 24:42, 43; 25:13; chronological first in Luke 12:37). Over half of the uses (13 out of 23) are set in eschatological contexts. Apart from two Pauline uses (1 Thess. 5:6, 10), all other eschatological uses (11 out of 13) are found on the lips of Jesus, with seven uses in the Synoptics and three in Revelation (Rev. 3:2, 3; 16:15). This is strong evidence that Paul borrowed the term *grēgoreō* from the Lord.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> The Greek word *kleptēs* (“thief”) and the cognate verb *kleptō* (“to steal”) often can be distinguished from *lēstēs* (“robber”) in that the latter emphasizes violence while the former stresses secrecy. N. Hillyer, “Rob, Steal,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 3:377.

<sup>108</sup> For a more extended treatment of *grēgoreō* see John F. Hart, “Should Pretribulationists Reconsider the Rapture in Matthew 24:36–44? Part 3 of 3,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 21 (autumn 2008): 53–58.

<sup>109</sup> “In the Gospels, the Lord calls the disciples to shun ‘sleep’ by being ‘alert’ so that they do not fall into temptation (Matt. 26.40–41; Mark 14.37–38; Luke 22.45–46) and so that they may be ready because they do not know the hour of the coming of the Lord (Mark 13.32–37). The same complex of ideas appears in this section of 1 Thessalonians, which suggests that the source of the instruction is the teaching of Jesus himself.” Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 238.

A debate exists in 1 Thessalonians 5:10 as to whether “awake” (*grēgoreō*) or “asleep” [*katheudō*] refer to living versus dead believers, or faithful versus unfaithful believers. Scholars who see *katheudō* in 5:10 as describing physically dead believers insist that *katheudō* has a different meaning than the same verb in 1 Thessalonians 5:6, “so then let us not sleep [*katheudō*] as others do.” Cf. among many, F. F. Bruce, *First and Second Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1982), 114.

Ten of the thirteen eschatological uses show up in connection with the thief imagery. So, it is not surprising that imminence appears to be a common accompaniment to the use of *grēgoreō*. In the case of Gethsemane, temptation was imminent for the disciples (“Behold, the hour is at hand,” Matt. 26:45).<sup>110</sup> In Acts 20:31 alertness was essential because Paul predicted that as soon as he would leave, false teachers would begin an attempt to infiltrate the Ephesian elders (vv. 29–30). Peter instructed his readers to watch since Satan may attack at any moment (1 Pet. 5:18). Therefore, there is a suggestion of imminence in most if not all the noneschatological uses of *grēgoreō* as well.

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But if Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4–5 borrows *grēgoreō* from Jesus’ eschatological teachings in the OD on moral watchfulness, then *grēgoreō* in 1 Thessalonians 5:10 must describe faithful versus unfaithful Christians, not Christians who are physically alive versus physically dead. Jesus has not used *grēgoreō* as meaning physical death. BDAG lists its final definition of *grēgoreō* as “to be alive (opp. to dead . . .).” But 1 Thessalonians 5:10 is the only verse from all of Greek literature that they mention for this definition. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, trans. Walter Bauer, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. *grēgoreō*, 207–8. This limitation is admitted by Green, *Letters to the Thessalonians*, 244. But since both Greek words, *grēgoreō* and *katheudō*, appear together in 5:6 and 5:10, it becomes impossible in this close proximity to take *both* words as having different meanings in the two vv.: “alert” and “unprepared” spiritually in 5:6 and “living” and “dead” in 5:10.

Supporting the fact that “awake” (*grēgoreō*) and “asleep” (*katheudō*) in 1 Thessalonians 5:10 refer to faithful versus unfaithful Christians, not Christians who are physically alive versus physically dead, see Thomas R. Edgar, “Lethargic or Dead in 1 Thessalonians 5:10?” *Conservative Theological Seminary Journal* 6 (October–December 2000): 36–51. This article is a revised version of Thomas R. Edgar, “The Meaning of ‘Sleep’ in 1 Thessalonians 5:10,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22 (December 1979): 345–49. Cf. also Zane C. Hodges, “1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 and the Rapture,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 6 (October–December 2000): 31–32; Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Time Prophecy. A Comprehensive Approach*, rev. and expanded (Chicago: Moody, 2006), 267; Robert L. Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 11:285–86.

An attempt to rebut this view is found in Tracy L. Howard, “The Meaning of ‘Sleep’ in 1 Thessalonians 5:10—A Reappraisal,” *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (fall 1985): 337–49.

<sup>110</sup> Nolland holds that the intended sense of *grēgoreō* in Matt. 26:38 is the same as that in 24:42, 43; 25:13, i.e., spiritual (not physical) watchfulness. Nolland, *Matthew*, 1098.

These factors lead to the logic of constructing a consistent and unifying use of *grēgoreō* in all thirteen eschatological passages. Ladd faults pretribulationists for sometime applying the command for watchfulness to the posttribulational second coming (Matt. 24:43), and other times to the church and the rapture (1 Thess. 5).<sup>111</sup>

If pretribulationists agree that 1 Thessalonians 5:6 (and 10) use *grēgoreō* to instruct believers of the NT church to “stay alert” for the coming pretribulational rapture, then isn’t it logical that Jesus could have utilized the same word in the same way in the OD?<sup>112</sup> If so, then Paul has brought over Jesus’ concern regarding alertness for His imminent (pretribulational) return resident in the verb *grēgoreō*.<sup>113</sup>

The regular use of *grēgoreō* with the thief imagery and the imminent return of a homeowner in eschatological contexts intimates the need for a consistency of interpretation. Since in most contexts and especially eschatological contexts *grēgoreō* stresses imminence, the use of *grēgoreō* is most appropriate for the pretribulational rapture of the church, not a posttribulational return of Christ.<sup>114</sup> “Watching” or “alert-

<sup>111</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), 114–17.

<sup>112</sup> It is an interesting observation that in the sections of the OD describing the signs of the final coming of the Lord (Matt. 24:4–35), the verb *grēgoreō* does not appear. There either the imperative of *horaō* (“See! Look at!” Matt. 24:6; Luke 21:29) or of *blepō* (“Watch out!” “Be on guard!” Matt. 24:4; Mark 13:5, 9, 23, 33; Luke 21:8) are used. In fact, Matt. 24:4 marks the first use of the imperative of *blepō* in the NT and six of the ten uses of the imperative of *blepō* are found in the OD. However, *blepō* may be appropriate for either the rapture or the second coming (cf. Mark 13:33 where both *blepō* and *grēgoreō* appear in the warning about the imminent return of the Lord).

<sup>113</sup> “A connection exists between the imagery of the thief and the idea of watchfulness in the New Testament.” Evald Uivestarn Lövestam, *Spiritual Wakefulness in the New Testament* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1963), 95.

<sup>114</sup> Besides Matt. 24:42, 43, two other passages containing *grēgoreō* may be thought to appear in posttribulational (or nonimminent) contexts: Matt. 25:13 and Revelation 16:15. In Revelation 16:15, the parenthetical nature of the remark together with the similarity of themes to chapters 2–3 suggest the apostle John is addressing the imminence of the coming hour of trial and pretribulation rapture in light of the final devastations of Armageddon. Cf. Thomas, *Revelation 18–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 267. However, Thomas maintains that the warnings surrounding the thief illustration in Revelation 16:15 are used by Jesus to encourage believers to “make their calling and election sure.” Other explanations of the warnings are more likely, i.e., warnings about the loss of future rewards for the unfaithful Christian. “Exhortations to vigilance presuppose that Christians are always

ness” is more fully appropriate for an imminent, pretribulational return of the Lord than for a posttribulational, nonimminent coming of Christ.<sup>115</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

It is the contention of this study that pretribulationists can exegetically and theologically interpret the pretribulation rapture in Matthew 24:36–44. If the proposal of this study is sound, then it is time that pretribulationists credit the Lord of the parousia with a more extensive role in originating and predicting the “blessed hope” than we have given Him.

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in danger of reducing their full commitment to God through Christ and of allowing themselves to be seized by things of lesser value.” J. M. Nützel, “*Grēgoreō*,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 1: 265.

Regarding Matt. 25:13, Lövestam writes, “The exhortation to keep awake, in v. 13, cannot be linked to the use of the sleep and wakefulness motifs in the parable (vv. 5–7). There it is said that all the virgins went to sleep, without this being presented as something blameworthy.” Lövestam, *Spiritual Wakefulness in the New Testament*, 121. Therefore, Matt. 25:13 may reflect a similar perspective as Revelation 16:15—an exhortation to the church about the rapture in light of a parable about the final coming of Christ. This may be supported by the double *inclusio* in the verse that takes the reader back to 24:42–43 and 24:36. Another option may be that the parable describes a general need for readiness at the Lord’s return, whether for the rapture or the second coming. The latter seems to be held by Hodges, *Jesus, God’s Prophet*, 38–43.

<sup>115</sup> The synonymous verb *agrypneō* (“be alert, keep watch”) used in parallel passages to the OD (Mark 13:33; Luke 21:36) is also used in contexts describing imminence.