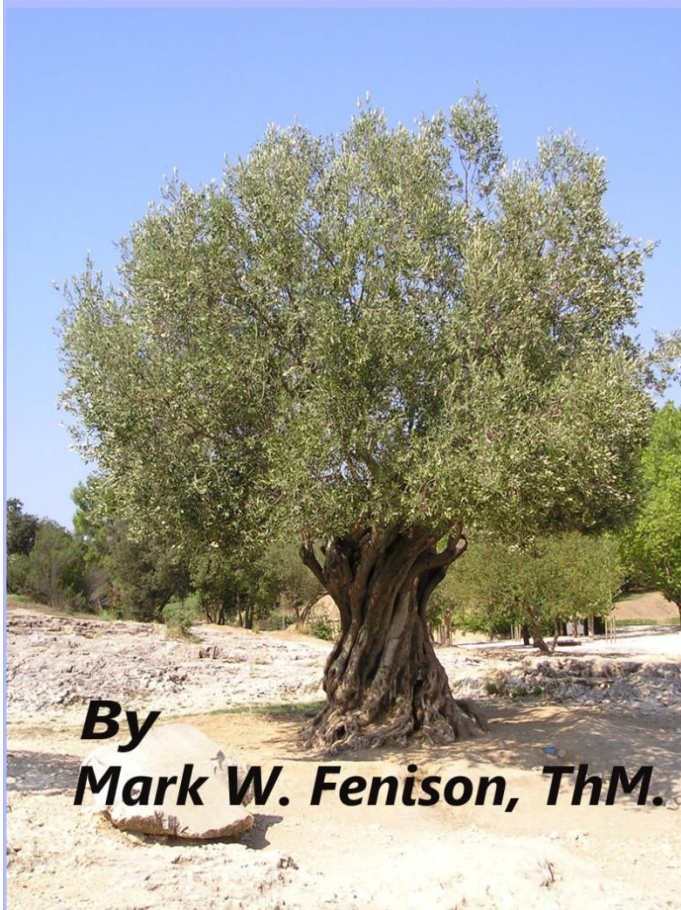


Now Learn a
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By
Mark W. Fenison, ThM.

Now Learn A Parable

by
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Introduction

The term “eschatology” comes from two Greek words *eschatos* (last things”) and *ology* (study of) and means “*study of last things.*” In order to grasp some of the disputes that surround this topic, there must be an understanding of some basic terminologies.

For example there are two basic areas of dispute that surround the two terms, “tribulation” and “millennium.” The term “tribulation” refers to a time of great trouble. The term “millennium” means a “thousand” and depending upon your view either refers to a *period of time*, before or after His coming or a *spiritual state* before His coming. Regardless, of your view the word means a “thousand” years.

In regard to the tribulation there are three views – Pre, Mid and Posttribulationist. In regard to the millennium there are also three views – Pre-, A-, and Postmillennialists.

Let’s first consider the issue of the millennium. The prefix “pre” means “before.” Some are called “**PRE**-millennialists” because they believe that at the end of this age Christ will come and then set up a kingdom on earth and rule on earth for a thousand years **BEFORE** He ushers in a new heaven and earth. At the beginning of this thousand year period, they believe that the nation Israel will be restored to God and will rule over the other nations of the world during this time. The prefix “pre” points out that they believe His second coming will occur **BEFORE** this thousand year period begins.

Others identify themselves as “**POST**-millennialist. The prefix “post” means “after.” A **POST**-millennialist believe that Jesus will come **AFTER** (post) a thousand year reign. They

would spiritualize this thousand year reign. Instead of interpreting it as a period of time or one thousand literal years with Christ literally reigning on earth, they believe it is the present rule of Christ through the gospel. They often call themselves “gospel millennialists” because they believe the gospel is being proclaimed now and will eventually dominate the earth so that the world welcomes Christ to earth. In their perspective things will get better and better due to the proclamation of the gospel during this period we live which they identify as the millennium or a spiritualized state or condition of gospel reign. They do not necessarily believe that the nation of Israel will be restored and reign with Christ over other nations although they do believe a “remnant” of Israel will be saved.

A third group identify themselves as “A-millennialists.” They do not believe in a literal thousand year reign of Christ upon this earth. The prefix “a” means “no” in Greek and therefore an “A-millennialists” is one who believes in “no millennium” at least in a literal sense. They believe that Christ is reigning in the hearts of His people now and that someday He will come and put down the kingdoms of this world and usher in a new heaven and earth. They do not believe in the restoration of the nation Israel nor do they believe in the resurrection of the righteous separated from the unrighteous by a thousand years. They believe in a general resurrection of all the dead at one time at the end of this age when Christ comes after He conquers the nations of this world. Upon the return of Christ the resurrection occurs and He immediately raises all the dead in one resurrection and then one judgment scene occurs after which he immediately creates a new heaven and earth.

Primarily it is among pre-millennialists that there is a dispute over the time of the rapture in regard to the tribulation period. All premillennialists (those who believe Christ will come first and then set up His kingdom on this

earth for a thousand years) believe that at the end of this age there will be a time of great trouble upon earth just prior to the second coming and millennial reign of Christ. They are divided over two things concerning this great time of trouble. They disagree when this trouble begins and how long this trouble will last and they disagree concerning the exact time Christ will come in regard to this time of trouble.

Many identify this time of trouble to be seven years in length and synonymous with the 70th week of Daniel in Daniel 9:24-27. Others believe that this time of trouble occurs within the 70th week beginning in the middle. Others believe that this time of trouble began with the 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem and continues unto the end of this age. The area of dispute over the exact time of Christ's return is identified by three prefixes attached to the word "tribulation" – Pre-tribulational, Mid-tribulation and Post-tribulation. All premillennialist believe He will come before the millennial period. However, some believe He will come before this tribulation period begins while others believe He will come during the middle of it while others believe he will come just prior to the close of this period.

Those who call themselves "**PRE**-tribulationists" believe that Jesus will come secretly before this time of tribulation begins and will resurrect and rapture away the saints and then pour judgments out upon this world, the antichrist and his followers. After this seven year period of tribulation they believe He will come with those raptured saints and put down the antichrist and set up the millennial reign of Christ upon a rehabilitated earth.

Others call themselves "**MID**-tribulationists" and they believe that Christ will not come or resurrect and rapture the saints until the middle of this last seven year period. They would make a distinction between Daniel's 70th week and the great tribulation. They would argue that the tribulation does

not begin until the middle of the 70th week of Daniel with the revelation of the Antichrist as “god.”

The last group call themselves “**POST**-tribulationists” because they believe that the Second coming involves only one coming and that it occurs just prior to the battle of Armageddon after the tribulation. They would make a distinction between the 70th week of Daniel and events that occur within this seven year period (such as the great tribulation, the wrath of God, the battle of Armageddon, etc.). They believe that Christ resurrects and raptures the saints to meet Him in the air and then descends to put down all earthly kingdoms at the battle of Armageddon and then sets up His millennial reign.

Hence, much of the debate in the area of eschatology revolves mainly around two periods of time. The period called Daniel’s 70th week or the final seven years of this age and the period called the millennial reign. You need to study what the Bible says concerning these two time periods and come to a conclusion about what you believe about them.

This writer is what would be called a Post-tribulation Premillennialists. I believe that Christ will come near the end of the 70th week of Daniel just prior to the battle of Armageddon. At that precise time He will resurrect and rapture the saints to Him in the air and then descend and enter into that battle. He will win and put down the kingdoms of this world. After His victory at Armageddon there will be a seventy-five day period wherein Christ will reward His saints according to their works and the marriage of the Lamb will occur followed by the marriage supper that usher’s in His thousand year reign over this earth.

The Key Parable

“And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads: for your redemption draweth nigh.” – Lk. 21:28

“Now learn a parable...(Mt. 24:32)..Behold the fig tree, and all the trees....When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves...(Mk. 13:28)....ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away...(Lk. 21:29-33)...

“But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven, but my Father only.” – Mt. 24:36

The above scriptures are taken from all three gospel accounts of what many call the Olivet Discourse. It is called the Olivet Discourse because Jesus spoke these things on the Mount of Olivet. The Olivet Discourse is the only full length discussion the Lord left us about end time events. The parable of *“the fig tree and all the trees”* is one of the parables spoken by the Lord in this discourse. The above combinations of texts provide the fuller picture of this grand parable. For example, Luke 21:28 acts as the transition verse between the previous historical section (Luke 21:7-27) and the following parabolic section (Luke 21:28-33). This discourse opens with a historical listing of events and closes

with parables. Luke 21:28 is the introduction and transition verse between the historical and parabolic sections. Luke 21:29 and Mark 13:28 provide more details left out by Matthew. Matthew 24:36 provides the natural conclusion to the primary lesson of this parable.

Why should we be diligent to “*learn*” this parable above all other parables dealing with end time events? First, it is the only end time parable Jesus commanded us to “*learn*.” This separates it from all the others. Second, this is the only parable repeated in all three accounts. No other parable has this kind of emphasis. Luke records no other parable but this one and Mark records no other parable found in Matthew but this one. Finally, in all three accounts the Holy Spirit places this parable first before all others in all three accounts.

These three facts clearly demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is giving this parable preeminence above all other parables in this discourse. These facts demonstrate this parable is intended to be the interpretative parable. The fact that Luke records no other parable but this one clearly shows it is intended to be the interpretative parable. He commands us to “*learn*” this parable because it is the key to understanding what Jesus means when he says “*watch*” in all the following parables. There are several things we can learn from this parable.

A. Learn the Primary Lesson of the Parable:

There are some that believe the primary lesson of this parable is to understand the “*fig*” tree to represent Israel. The inclusive “*all*” along with the mention of the “*fig*” tree means that the “*fig*” tree and “*all the trees*” share something in common. It is this common factor shared between “*all*” the trees that provides the primary lesson of this parable.

The “*fig tree*” was mentioned by name because those listening would most naturally be watching it above all others because of its coveted fruit. However, the primary lesson of this parable had to do with what the “*fig*” tree had in common (rather than in contrast) with “*all the trees*.” What do all trees have in common? During spring time the “*fig*” tree and “*all the trees*” react in a common way. They begin to bring forth green spouts and leaves. It is this common productivity found in “*all the trees*” including the “*fig*” tree that Jesus is going to use to teach His primary lesson.

His lesson has for its focus not the type of tree but the type of response and time of that response which all trees share in common. The response is the productivity of leaves and sprouts which indicate that the time is now spring.

“When they now shoot forth, ye SEE and KNOW of your own selves that summer is nigh at hand.” – Lk. 21:30

Did you get the point? When the sprouting takes place, those WATCHING can know what time it is “*NOW*” and therefore can also know what time is “*NIGH*.” When this response occurs spring is “*now*” and summer is “*nigh*.” Therefore His primary lesson is concerning how to **KNOW** what time it is by WATCHING for specific preceding events to summer.

“WHEN ye shall see these things....KNOW that it is near, even at the doors.” – Mt. 24:33

“WHEN ye shall see these things.....KNOW that it is nigh, even at the doors.” – Mk. 13:29

*“When they **now** shoot forth, ye **SEE** and **KNOW** of your own selves that **summer is nigh at hand.**” – Lk. 21:30*

After clearly emphasizing this primary point shared by “all the trees” Jesus directly applies this illustration in nature to His kingdom coming.

*“**SO LIKEWISE** ye, when ye shall see all these things, **KNOW** that it is near, even at the doors” – Mt. 24:33*

*“**SO** ye **IN LIKE MANNER**, when ye shall see these things come to pass, **KNOW** that it is nigh, even at the doors” – Mk. 13:29*

*“**LIKEWISE** ye, when ye see these things come to pass, **KNOW** that the **KINGDOM OF GOD** is nigh at hand.” – Lk. 21:29,31*

*“**And WHEN** these things **BEGIN** to come to pass, **THEN** look up, and lift up your heads for your redemption draweth nigh.” – Lk.21:28*

The point of this parable is to define how to know what is presently unknown. The illustration from nature shows how to know that Spring is “*now*” and therefore KNOW that summer is “*nigh at hand.*” The words “*SO LIKEWISE*” or “*SO...IN LIKE MANNER*” demand that the same point is being made in regard to His coming and the preceding signs that announce it. Apart from these preceding signs there is no other way to KNOW the “*day*” and “*hour*” or “*times*” and “*seasons*” as His coming is hid to all but the Father.

*“**But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only**” – Mt. 24:36*

“...Lord, wilt thou AT THIS TIME restore the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is NOT FOR YOU TO KNOW the times or the seasons, which THE FATHER HATH PUT IN HIS OWN POWER.” – Acts 1:6, 7

This parable teaches that the Father has designated heralds at a precise time in the future to reveal the time of Christ's coming to all who are watching. Hence, just as watching for summer is inseparable from watching for those Spring time events that announce it is nigh at hand, so likewise, it is impossible to be watching for the Lord's coming apart from watching for those preceding events that announce it is nigh at hand.

Just as watching and being ready for summer fruits inseparably includes watching for the trees to announce Spring life, so likewise, watching and being ready for the Lord's coming involves watching and being ready for those preceding events that herald it is nigh at hand. This is the point of the parable of *“all the trees.”* Watching is inclusive of both the heralds and the appearance of His coming. Hence, to *“watch”* is defined by this first parable to be inclusive of both the heralds of His coming as well as His personal appearance.

The more imminent aspect of His coming is the herald aspect of it as this precedes and announces that His appearance is at hand. Moreover, there is no warning that one is in the middle of the 70th week, because the things that characterize all previous generations (Mt. 24:5-14) characterize the first half of Daniel's week. Hence, His coming, regarded as inclusive of the heralds and actual appearance (Mt. 24:15-31) is imminent in that none can know when it will begin except by watching for it to occur. It is also imminent from God's perspective of time (2 Pet. 3:8-9).

This first parable has defined what we are to watch for (the heralds) if we are to be watching for the Lord's return at all. Jesus closes this parable by reminding us that NONE but the Father knows the time of His coming and therefore we must be watching NOW unless we be taken by surprise and "*these things*" come upon us like a "*snare*" or like a "*thief*" and catch us in an unready state in disgrace. Remember, there is no such thing as instant holiness, watching involves spiritual readiness inclusive of growth in progressive sanctification and daily readiness.

The historical section has warned us how we ought not to respond to these things when they occur. In so doing, He is implying that we ought to be ready to respond the right way. That right way is described in Luke 21:28. How to be ready to respond that way is the subject of the parabolic section that follows. Those ready can respond to the heralds in joy whereas those not ready can only respond like the rest of the world (fear, surprise, deception, ignorance, and in dishonor).

The parable of the "*good man*" is an illustration to impress upon the reader the need of constant watchfulness. Jesus said "*if the good man of the house would have known what hour the thief had come HE WOULD HAVE WATCHED.*" – The point is, he DID NOT watch and so his house was damaged. The damage refers back to the warnings in the historical part. The world will be damaged by surprise, confusion, deception and fear because they are not ready or watching. If he had been watching he would **not** have been caught by surprise. Constant readiness and watching is the lesson of this parable.

The illustration "*of the days of Noah*" teaches us that those who fail to take heed and watch will be caught by surprise. Jesus says that they "*knew not.*" This answers the objection

often thrown against Posttribblers. The objection is “*how can anyone be taken by surprise when the tribulation begins*”? Jesus answers this objection by the illustration of Noah. How could anyone be taken by surprise by the flood? Didn't Noah warn them for over 100 years? Didn't the building of the Ark alert them to coming judgment? Didn't the animals marching in two by two (seven by seven of the clean) alert them? Yet the Bible says that when the flood came they “*knew not.*”

It didn't take Noah or his family by surprise. Why? Because Noah and his family took heed and watched and was ready. When “*these things begin to come to pass*” they will take by surprise all those who were not prepared in advance.

The parable of the just and unjust stewards teaches another area of advance preparation for His coming. There is no such thing as instant holiness. When these things begin to come to pass it will be too late to become holy. Holiness comes by progressive faithfulness to God's Word. Those living unholy or ungodly lives will not be ready for what these things announce – the coming of the Lord in judgment. These things will bring judgments upon the unfaithful stewards and shut them out of the joy of those described in Luke 21:28.

The parable of the ten virgins is a very clear and very simple point. Both knew in advance that the Lord was coming. The wise did what was necessary in ADVANCE to prepare for that coming while the foolish did not. Jesus had instructed His disciples in the historical section of what to expect and how not to respond when these things begin. The wise would take heed to this instruction and be prepared to respond exactly as instructed “when these things begin.” In so doing, they could receive these things joyfully in great expectation. On the other hand, those who are not mentally

and spiritual prepared for such things in advance will be shut out of that particular joy of His coming. The point of this parable is that it is FOOLISH not to prepare in advance for what you know will come. Those who are not prepared in ADVANCE will be scurrying about trying to obtain mentally and spiritually what the wise obtained in advance. The point is that those who do not take heed to His instructions concerning “*these things*” in advance will be SHUT OUT of that particular joy that can only be for those ready when these things begin (Lk. 21:28).

The parable of the talents provides us with another lesson of advance preparation. While we are watching and waiting we are to be busy in the Lord’s work. Those standing idle will not be ready to face the Lord at His coming. Watching includes spiritual faithfulness BEFORE He comes.

The parable of the sheep and goats teach that separation will occur within the professing kingdom of God when Christ returns. Many other texts teach this same judgment of professors (Mt. 7:21-23; 13:28-30; 36-43). The goats asked when Christ was in such need and they did not respond to His needs. In other words they claimed to be Christians. At that day Christ will not judge the fitness for entrance into His kingdom on the basis of mere profession of faith but rather upon the evidence of a living faith. The term “*brethren*” is being referred to in the same sense as “little children” in Matthew 18. Both the “*brethren*” and “*little children*” are spoken of in the third person but represent true believers. The point of this last parable is that mere profession does not make you ready for the Lord’s return. These goats refer to professing Christians that survive the tribulation period such as the evil servant and the idle servant in the previous parables.

Throughout these parables the emphasis has been on holy living and the uncertainty of timing when the Lord

returns and therefore the need for constant watchfulness. We believe this fits perfectly with the intent of the parable of *“all the trees.”* Now nobody knows the exact time of His coming therefore in order to KNOW that time we must be CONSTANTLY WATCHING and READY. That time will be announced by particular preceding events yet in the future and the time for these revealing events are yet unknown. To simply wait until “these things” occur before attempting to get ready for His coming is IMPOSSIBLE because holiness is not something you put on or take off. Either you will be ready to respond in joy to these things or you will not and the difference is advance mental preparation and expectation.

Some have lifted Matthew 24:36 out of its context and demanded that Jesus is referring to an altogether different coming than what the immediate context has just described (Mt. 24:29-35). Not only is such an interpretation unwarranted by the immediate context but it is destructive to the intent of the parable that precedes it. The intent of that parable is to define what Christ wants us to be watching for when later He says “watch” and why we need to watch for preceding events as that is the only way to come to KNOW what none presently know but the Father.

*“...when ye shall see these things come to pass
KNOW that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.”*

B. Learn The Subjects being Addressed:

The subjects are identified in the parable as *“ye.”* Grammatically, pronouns are identified by their nearest antecedent. If we trace this pronoun back to its nearest antecedent we find that it is identified in Matthew 24:3 as *“the disciples”* and in verse 1 as *“his disciples”*. Mark 13:3 more specifically identifies these disciples as *“Peter and James and John and Andrew”*. From the beginning of this discourse unto the end there is no change in the pronoun

and therefore no change in the subject being addressed. This whole discourse is spoken to “*his disciples*.”

The issue of debate has always been concerning what capacity is Christ addressing “*His disciples*”? Are they being addressed by the common understanding of the term “*disciple*” as used in the New Testament or is there a departure from this common meaning? The book of Matthew provides only one definition of “*His disciples*” and that is found in Matthew 28:19-20. This definition is followed by all other gospel writers and epistles. The Bible knows of no other definition or usage of “*His disciples*” outside of the Matthew 28:19-20 definition. It certainly cannot be disputed that “*Peter and James and John and Andrew*” were of the Matthew 28:19-20 kind of disciple.

Some argue that they represent a special class of unbaptized and unchurched Jewish believers during the Great Tribulation. However, will the immediate context support such a new and different definition of “*His disciples*”? For example, does the Bible anywhere identify a special class of unbaptized, and unchurched believers as “*His disciples*”? Does the immediate context explicitly make such an application?

Whoever they might represent, one thing is clear from the grammar. The grammar demands that only one subject is consistently addressed from beginning to the end of this discourse. Grammar says there is no change to another subject.

Not only does the grammar demand one consistent subject being addressed but the contextual development insists that the same subject is being addressed throughout the discourse. For example, Matthew 24:5-29 lists events still future to those being addressed as “*His disciples*.” The purpose in listing these events is not only to answer their

question about the future but primarily to instruct them how to respond to such things when they face them. For example, they are not to be deceived when false Christ's arrive. They are not to believe certain things indicate the end has come. They are not to fear such things when they do come. They are not to believe certain teachings about His coming. In Matthew 24:25 Jesus bluntly tells "*his disciples*" – "*Behold I have told you BEFORE.*" Hence, from Matthew 24:5 until Matthew 24:25 they represent the same subject whom is being forewarned prior to any of these things coming to pass. This fact demands two obvious conclusions.

First, they are being addressed as PRE-crisis disciples. If "these things" are descriptive of the 70 AD destruction then they are PRE-70 AD disciples. If the contextual crisis is the 70th week of Daniel then they are PRE-70th week disciples. Whatever the crisis may be they are "his disciples" prior to these things. That makes them PREtribulation disciples.

Second, there is no sense in forewarning them if they are not going to be present when these things come to pass. Why tell them not to believe certain teachings if they will not be present when such teachings occur? Why tell them not to fear that certain things indicate the end has come if they are not present when such things occur? Hence, common sense dictates that they are being forewarned as Pretrib disciples because they will remain on earth and become tribulation disciples. Luke 21:28 makes the transition from prewarned pretrib disciples to tribulation disciples.

"And when these things begin to come to pass then look up and lift up your heads for your redemption draweth nigh".

Matthew 24:5-29 list the preceding things to His coming and warn them how they ought not to respond to such things. However, Luke 21:28 instructs them how they should

respond to these things. While the world responds “*Oh no, woe is me*” they are to respond in excited expectation that these same things herald the near coming of Christ – “*Oh boy, here comes the Lord.*”

He has told them how not to respond as well as how they should respond to these things when they begin to come to pass. In the parabolic section (Mt. 24:32-25:30), he instructs them how they can be ready to respond as directed in Luke 21:28.

AD 70 and/or 70th Week Disciples

There have been two extreme applications of this discourse. There are those who insist that it has already been completely fulfilled in the 70 AD destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman General Titus. There are others that are just as insistent that it is all yet future, and will be fulfilled in the 70th week of Daniel.

The truth is that both are right and both are wrong. Jesus is employing a prophetic technique commonly used by Old Testament prophets. He is prophetically describing a greater event way off in the distant future (70th week of Daniel) through the use of a lesser nearer event (70 AD destruction).

For example, both Isaiah and Jeremiah would predict the near fall of Assyria by Babylon and then the fall of Babylon by the Medo-Persia kingdom. However, they would use terms and descriptions that would go beyond the immediate and find fulfillment in the overthrow of the final kingdoms of this world by God at the end of the age. So likewise Jesus is using the near AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem to point to

and describe the final attack of the Antichrist against Jerusalem in the 70th week of Daniel at the end of this age.

Both Matthew and Mark place emphasis upon the far event. However, Luke who is writing to gentiles (Lk. 1:3) separates the two events because the gentile reader would not be familiar with this prophetic technique.

Luke describes the AD 70 destruction in Luke 21:20-24a. He also predicts the aftermath of a span of time when Israel is scattered into all nations. However, he then introduces the second event with the words “*until the times of the gentiles be fulfilled.*” These words needed no explanation to the readers of Daniel. The precise time of this fulfillment is spelled out by Daniel in the following language:

*“And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand **UNTIL a time and times and the dividing of time.** But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.”* – Dan. 7:24-27

This three and half year period is the fulfillment of the times of the Gentiles. Here is how the times of the gentiles will be fulfilled. It will be fulfilled in a three and half year period at the end of the age when tribulation upon God’s saints occurs and wrath upon the Antichrist and his kingdom will occur. Luke goes on to describe God’s wrath upon the world (Lk. 21:25-26) which is later described by John under the metaphors of trumpets and vials.

This double application resolves the argument over what “*this generation*” means. It refers to “*this generation*” at Christ’s first coming which would see the near prophetic event in AD 70. It also refers to “*this generation*” at Christ’s second coming which would see the far prophetic event described in Daniel.

Furthermore, in regard to the near AD 70 event it cannot be denied that “*his disciples*” refers to the literal baptized church “*disciples*”. They would literally see all those things that led up to and culminate in the AD 70 destruction. They were PRE-70 AD disciples. So likewise, the final application has to do with that generation of disciples living prior to the far event. They are PRE-trib disciples.

The grammar and context of the Olivet Discourse absolutely demands this. The pronoun remains unchanged throughout the discourse. They are obviously pretrib disciples because they are warned in advance. They become tribulation disciples because they are told how to respond “*when these things begin*” (Lk. 21:28). Those “*disciples*” in “*this generation*” that precedes the 70th week of Daniel not only see all these things begin but they see all these things actually come to pass including the coming of Christ in power (Lk. 21:30). No amount of mental gymnastics can avoid these clear statements and deny the continuity of the subject before, at and during those things being described. The subject does not change at any juncture. Regardless of whether it is the near or the far application “*this generation*” precedes the crisis and then enter into it. Next it will be proven that “*this generation*” refers to the literal generation at the first and the second coming of Christ.

This Generation, not “race”

Prior to 1984 there was general agreement among conservative scholars that “*this generation*” referred to the common understanding of the term “*generation*.” However, most interpreted the Biblical “*generation*” to be 40 years. In 1948 Israel returned to Palestine and most conservative scholars believed that within a period of 40 years the end would come. However, when it did not come as expected another interpretation became more popular. They decided that the Greek term should be translated by the rare meaning “*race*” instead of “*generation*.” This interpretation would not limit “*these things*” to a limited time frame but rather to the continuity of the Jewish race. The resulting idea was that THE JEWISH RACE would not go out of existence until all these things be fulfilled. This interpretation gave them more breathing room.

However, does the context support this new interpretation? One basic rule of interpretation demands that we must accept the common meaning of a word as long as the common meaning makes sense before seeking a rare meaning. “*Race*” is a rare meaning. Can the common meaning make sense in this context. Those who oppose the common meaning argue that the common meaning makes no sense in this context. These interpreters see only the final and ultimate application (70th week) and thus argue that “*this generation*” to whom Christ was literally speaking did not live to see such things. However, was Christ referring to His own generation at the first advent in Matthew 24:35 or to the generation that would see all these things begin as well as come to pass in fulfillment?

Moreover, if the prophetic technique of a dual fulfillment is recognized then the common meaning makes perfect sense. If Christ has in view two separate events and two separate generations – the generation at His first advent and the generation at his second advent, then, “*this generation*” as applied to each advent makes perfect sense. Such an

application of “*this generation*” would mean that the literal generation at the first advent would indeed “see all these things come to pass” in regard to the AD 70 prediction. Likewise, the application of “*this generation*” to the second advent would mean that the literal generation at the second advent would indeed “*see all these things come to pass*” in regard to the 70th week of Daniel.

Furthermore, the common meaning is fully supported by the immediate context. The first mention of “*this generation*” is found in Matthew 23:36. Here Jesus contrasts “*the days of our fathers*” who killed the prophets with “*this generation*” (Mt. 23:30,36). Making a contrast between “*the days of our fathers*” and “*this race*” makes no sense as the “*this race*” would be inclusive instead of contrasting. The phrase “*days of our fathers*” is synonymous with the “*generations of our fathers.*” Christ’s point is that in each “*generation*” the prophets received the same treatment as He would receive in “*this generation.*” However, “*this generation*” is the culmination of all previous generations as “*this generation*” will kill the prophet of Whom all prophets in all previous generations prophesied about. Hence, the rejection and killing of Christ was the culmination of all previous generations. Absolute evidence that “*generation*” instead of “*race*” is the intended meaning is the fact that Christ begins with “*Abel*” as the first prophet killed. The Jewish “*race*” had no existence prior to Abraham. However, Abel was the first prophet killed in the first “*generation*” of mankind and every generation since has followed suit. The particular evil of “*this generation*” is that they would reject Christ while all other generations rejected only those who predicted Christ. In Matthew 23:36 “*this generation*” by context refers to the literal generation that would see the AD 70 destruction because of their rejection of Christ.

His second use of “*this generation*” occurs in Matthew 24:34. Immediately after saying “*this generation*” in Matthew

24:34, Christ compares “*this generation*” with “*the days of Noah*” (Mt. 24:37). This phrase “*days of*” is synonymous with the idea of Noah’s “*generation.*” He is not referring to the “*days*” before or after Noah but to that present generation which witnessed all those things that led up to the end of the world. The point of comparison is that Noah’s “*generation*” was the final generation at the end of a world. They saw all those things that announced the end of the world come to pass. So likewise, “*this generation*” or the final generation of mankind will also see all the preceding signs that announce coming judgment at the end of the world.

In Matthew 23:36 “*this generation*” has reference to the generation living at Christ’s first advent which would see the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple as the judgment prophesied in Isaiah 28 and Daniel 9:26:

“And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.” – Dan. 9:26

However, in Matthew 24:34 we have it referring to the literal and final generation of mankind on earth. We know the context demands this because there is the immediate comparison with “*As in the days of Noah.*” The telescopic technique used by the prophets would only reinforce this interpretation. If it is recognized that Jesus is combining two events, one near while the other one is far in the future, then, “*this generation*” could be applied to each without contradiction and make perfect sense. He is describing the far distant 70th week event in terms that also apply in a limited way to the near 70 AD prophetic destruction of Jerusalem. Both the first and second coming “*generations*” are in view.

Learn what “things” you need to watch for

In Matthew 24:5-14 Jesus first describes things that we are not to interpret as indicators that the end is near (Mt. 24:6,8):

“...for ALL THESE THINGS must come to pass, but the end is not yet.” – v. 6

“ALL THESE THINGS are the beginning of sorrows” – v. 8

Jesus is describing general birth pangs that can be found in every generation including the last generation. However, as such, they do not clearly distinguish the last from all others. Therefore He plainly says that *“all these things”* do not indicate the end of the world has come. These things are not the distinctive signs of the final generation.

Beginning in Matthew 24:15 the specific things that reveal the last generation are spelled out in detail. Indeed, verse 15 is introduced by a watch word *“When ye shall see”* and then followed by verses which describe a particular period of time identified as “then” and “those days” and finally closes with the time words *“immediately after THE TRIBULATION OF THOSE DAYS”* (v. 29). Between verses 15-29 there is a definite period yet to come with definite signs that is called *“the tribulation of those days”*.

Remember that Jesus is using the Old Testament technique of a future final event crouched in the description of a near event. If we want to know what are the specific signs of the **near** event they are spelled out in Luke 21:20-24a. If we want to know what are the specifics of the **far** and **final** event it is found in the language that goes beyond the

AD 70 event which includes the actual coming of Christ in the clouds. Matthew and Mark emphasize the signs of the far event while Luke emphasizes the preceding signs of the near event. This provides both “*generations*” clear warning.

For example, Matthew and Mark point the reader to the eschatological person of the “*abomination of desolation*” found in the book of Daniel – the picture of the final antichrist on earth. On the other hand, Luke points to the “armies” of Titus the Roman General (Lk. 21:20). Matthew and Mark speak of a “*shortened*” tribulation that is greater than any that ever preceded it or will follow it. Luke also brings the reader up to the final great crisis at the end of the world when he says “*until the times of the gentiles be fulfilled*” (Lk. 21:24b). Any reader of Daniel knew that the times of the gentiles would be fulfilled by the final beastly kingdom at the end of this age (Dan. 7:19,23) under the antichrist (Dan. 7:20-21,24-26) Indeed, Luke continues after his description of the AD 70 destruction and the scattering of Israel among the gentile nations to describe a time of universal trouble after the fall destruction of Jerusalem and scattering of Israel among the nations that the world has never seen before or will see again:

“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations; with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of the heaven shall be shaken.”

– Lk. 21:25-26

These are the things that terminate the “*times of the Gentiles*” as well as the end of this age. They are those things described in the book of Revelation under the trumpets and vials.

Matthew and Mark mix the near with the far whereas Luke separates them from each other. Luke is writing to gentiles (Lk. 1:3) who would not be familiar with the prophetic technique of mixing so He separates the two.

As the literal disciples being addressed in the Olivet Discourse were PRE-70 AD disciples being warned in advance in order to know how to respond when Titus the Roman general encompassed Jerusalem, SO LIKEWISE, we as PRE-trib disciples are to be watching for those things that announce the 70th week in order that we too might respond accordingly (Lk. 21:28).

What we are to be watching for are those things that define the final generation of mankind from all previous generations. It is “these things” that herald the end of the age and it is these things that the parable of the trees would have us WATCH for.

Learn the designated time for an increased Expectation

“And **WHEN these things BEGIN to come to pass THEN look up, lift up your heads for your redemption draweth nigh.**” – Lk. 21:28

The above verse specifies an exact point of time when an increased expectation is to begin. This exact point of time begins “*when these things BEGIN to come to pass.*” As previously noted, Jesus is not talking about those things listed in Matthew 24:5-14 but rather those things beginning in Matthew 24:15-29. Those things listed in Matthew 24:15-29 are the things that identify the second half of the 70th week of Daniel. The abomination of desolation is revealed in the midst of the 70th week according to Daniel 12:11-13. It is this specific sign that reveals exactly what time it is on God’s prophetic calendar. All other previous things (Mt. 24:5-14)

are general signs that characterize every generation to some extent. But “*when you shall see...the abomination of desolation*” you know exactly what time it is. Hence, at this precise point the countdown can begin.

It is significant that Jesus says that they can know that their redemption “*draweth nigh.*” There is a great difference between “near” and “here.” Jesus does not say that their redemption is here when these things begin. He says it is “*nigh*” or near. They are to respond to these end time events with greater expectation for the coming of the Lord. Why? Because “*this generation*” will be the first generation in the history of mankind (other than Noah’s) that can KNOW that the end has come and the Lord’s return is nigh at hand.

All the parables that follow this interpretative parable impress upon the reader the need for watching NOW for Christ as defined by this interpretative parable. The kind of expectation described in the parables that follow this interpretative parable implies two things. First, the uncertainty of “*when these things*” will begin and the need for constant readiness. Second the certain expectation of the Kingdom of God when these things do begin. Hence, by context these parables are applicable only to pretrib disciples entering the second half of the 70th week of Daniel. Obviously, the generation of disciples seeing all these things come to pass cannot help but have a greater expectation of the soon return of Christ. They will be the only generation that can KNOW how nigh His coming is.

The Expectation of Early Christians

In the first three centuries of Christianity, the early Christians mistakenly believed that the abomination of desolation or antichrist was revealed in the Roman Emperor who claimed to be God and to be worshipped as God. Under

his persecution they believed they were already in the Great Tribulation and therefore expressed the expectation that Christ's coming was shortly at hand.

Pretrib historians quote only the aspects of their expectation while avoiding their clear belief that the churches of Christ were either already in the Great Tribulation or were about to enter it. Pretrib historians acknowledge that these Christians expressed the belief they were already in or about to enter tribulation but dismiss it because they are unable to harmonize these two aspects. However, their belief was consistent with Christ's teaching in the parable of "*all the trees*". It is the pretrib historians that have failed to learn this parable and therefore failed to understand these early Christians. All Baptist groups during the dark ages clearly stated that they believed they were already in the Great Tribulation and identified Rome as the Great Whore and the Pope as the Antichrist. In accordance with that belief they also expressed an expectation for the soon return of Christ. These early Christians responded to what they perceived to be the antichrist and the 70th week of Daniel just as Christ taught them:

"And when these things begin to come to pass then look up and lift up your heads for your redemption draweth nigh." – Lk. 21:28

Learn from the parable of "*all the trees*" that an expectation for the soon appearing of Christ is consistent with thinking you're in the Great Tribulation or about to enter it. Learn from the parable of "*all the trees*" that WATCHING for Christ's return includes watching for these things to begin. Learn from this parable that you MUST be watching NOW for these things to begin in order to KNOW in advance when the Kingdom of God is coming nigh. The parables that follow this interpretative parable simply reinforce these principles. The parables that follow are applicable to disciples that will see all these things begin to come to pass in the final generation.

Are we the final generation? That can only be KNOWN if we see these things “*begin*” to come to pass.

“Therefore what I say unto you, I say UNTO ALL, Watch” – Mk. 13:37

The expectation of those being addressed in the Olivet parables is dependent upon “*when ye shall see these things come to pass.*” Knowing how near the coming of the Lord is, is dependent upon “*when ye shall see these things come to pass.*” The parable of all the trees demands that you cannot be watching for the return of Christ without watching for “*when...these things begin to come to pass.*” The parable of all the trees defines what it means to “watch” for Christ in all the following parables of the Olivet Discourse. This is why it stands at the head of all the other parables. This is why it is the only parable repeated three times. This is why Jesus commands us to “learn” this parable.

Therefore, our expectation is an *any generation* expectation and all these things can “*shortly come to pass*”. Be alert and be watching for you do not know the hour or the day, the times or the seasons apart from WATCHING for these things to begin.

Learn the Certainty of the fulfillment of unfulfilled prophecy

“Verily, I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” – Mt. 24:35

The ultimate proof of the inspiration of the scriptures is 100% fulfilled prophecy. All other religions and all other religious writings cannot measure up to this standard. Only

God can be so accurate and therefore only the Bible is God's Word. The failure of even one unfulfilled prophecy would make God a liar and His word untrustworthy and reduce Him down to the level of the gods of other world religions.

There is a theory today that is very popular which has its basis in the denial that there exists even one unfulfilled prophecy that must precede the coming of the Lord. The popular "any second" expectation of the Lord's return rests solely upon the belief that nothing prevents the Lord from returning at "any second" since He ascended into heaven. If there is but one unfulfilled prophecy after His ascension into heaven that must be fulfilled prior to His return, then, this would be SOMETHING that would prevent anyone from believing that NOTHING prevents His return at any second. If such unfulfilled prophecies exist after the ascension of Christ then any theory that would deny such is a serious error as it would force those who embrace that theory to choose between prophetic inspiration and this any second theory. It is impossible to believe that preceding prophecies must be fulfilled prior to the Lord's return while at the same time believing NOTHING prevents the Lord from returning at any second. There is no middle ground; one is true while the other is error. If there are preceding prophecies that need to be fulfilled first then to embrace a theory which deny their fulfillment is to deny the inspiration of the Word of God. Nothing can be more heretical than taking a position that forces you to deny prophetic inspiration as all other truth depends upon prophetic inspiration.

We can clearly show that not merely one, but many unfulfilled prophecies prevented early Christians from believing such a theory.

For example, even before the ascension into heaven, Jesus commanded them to wait for the promise of the Holy

Spirit “*not many days hence.*” This prophecy was emphasized by John the Baptist and Christ. This is something that prevented an *any second* expectation of His return after His ascension. He could not come before without making God a liar and the scriptures untrustworthy.

For example, before the ascension into heaven, Jesus commanded them to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judah and Samaria unto the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). This was the great commission of the Church. It wasn't until Acts 8 that the church went further than Jerusalem. It wasn't until after Acts 10 that the first gentile was witnessed to. It wasn't until Acts 13 that the first missionaries were sent unto the gentiles. Even at the writing of Acts 28 Paul had not gone to Gaul and other parts. This is SOMETHING that prevented an “any second” expectation of His return after His ascension. He could not come before this without making God a liar and the scriptures untrustworthy.

For example, after His ascension into heaven Peter stood up and quoted an unfulfilled prophecy in regard to the office of Judas (Acts 1:15-17). He said that this prophecy “must” be fulfilled. Here is SOMETHING that prevents the any second expectation after His ascension. He could not come before this without making God a liar and the scriptures untrustworthy.

For example, God told Ananias that Paul “must” suffer many things for His name sake and go “*bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel*” (Acts 9:15-16). This necessarily implied a long and extended ministry. Paul had not been sent out unto the Gentiles prior to Acts 13. He was still quoting this statement by Christ in Acts 22:21 and Acts 26. Here is SOMETHING that prevented an *any second* expectation after His ascension. He could not come before these things without making Himself a liar and the scriptures untrustworthy.

For example, Christ told Paul by the Holy Spirit “*in every city*” (Acts 20:23) that he “*must*” go to Jerusalem, and then he “must” go to Rome (Acts 23:11) and then he “must” stand before Caesar (Acts 27:24). Here are SOME THINGS that prevented Christ from coming at “any second” after His ascension. He could not come before these things without making Himself a liar and the scriptures untrustworthy.

For example, Christ told all of us in the Olivet Discourse that Jerusalem would be destroyed BEFORE they were scattered into all nations and BEFORE the times of the Gentiles would be fulfilled (Lk. 20:24) and BEFORE the 70th week of Daniel begins (Dan. 9:26). Here is SOMETHING that prevents the “any second” expectation of Christ’s return after His ascension. He could not come before these things without making Himself a liar and the scriptures untrustworthy.

For example, Isaiah prophesied that the canon of Scripture would be completed under the supervision of the Apostles prior to the coming of the Lord (Isa. 8:16-18). Jesus affirmed this promise in the upper room by the coming of the Holy Spirit which would lead them into “*all truth*”. The apostles recognized this prophetic task and claimed to be fulfilling it (2 Pet. 3:15-17; I Jn. 4:5-6; Rev. 22:17-18). Here is SOMETHING that prevents the expectation of an “any second” return after the ascension of Christ. He could not come before this without making God a liar and the scriptures untrustworthy.

For example, Peter was told that when he was young he went where he wanted but when he grew old he would die a certain type of death (Jn. 21:18-19). John said that these things were popularly known (Jn. 21:23) and especially since he published in his gospel. Peter says this prophecy was well known (2 Pet. 1:14) as he also published it abroad. Here

is SOMETHING that prevented the expectation of an “any second” return after His ascension. He could not come before this without making Himself a liar and the scriptures untrustworthy.

The list goes on and on (Isa. 11:11, 2 Thes. 2:1-3, etc.). However, only ONE is sufficient to prove that the “any second” theory is something that New Testament Christianity could not believe without making God a liar and the scriptures untrustworthy.

How do Pretrib theologians respond to such problems to their theory?

First, some argue that all these things could have occurred FASTER than they actually did. Grant it but still they had to happen FIRST and anything which must happen FIRST denies an expectation that demands NOTHING must happen first.

Second, some deny the need of fulfillment. They argue that Jesus could come and render all these things unnecessary. In other words, they are clearly inferring that the Holy Spirit is a liar and the prophetic word is not dependable.

Third, some try to argue that all unfulfilled prophecies are NOW fulfilled and therefore nothing NOW prevents the any second return. This is an admission of error. This admits that New Testament Christianity could not and did not believe in imminency and therefore it is only NOW an acceptable belief. This also begs the question. How can we NOW believe in a doctrine that New Testament writers could not teach nor believe THEN? The scores of unfulfilled prophecies prevented any apostle from believing that NOTHING prevents the any second return of the Lord. If many unfulfilled prophecies existed THEN how can we be sure

that many do not exist NOW? This is just mental gymnastics that tries to beg the question.

Last, some try to argue that most Christians did not know of these unfulfilled prophecies and therefore they believed nothing prevented them from embracing an any second return of Christ. These prophecies were published early and spread among the churches. More importantly, the Holy Spirit knew and such a theory would make Him speak out of both sides of His mouth. The Holy Spirit would not teach some that necessary preceding prophecies were still unfulfilled while leading others to believe nothing needed to be fulfilled. – This makes God the author of confusion.

You cannot believe in the inspiration of the scriptures and hold to the pretrib theory. Why? Simply because the pretrib doctrine of imminence forbids you to believe in the necessary fulfillment of unfulfilled preceding prophecies prior to the coming of the Lord. You cannot believe that NOTHING prevents an any second return and at the same instant believe that SOMETHINGS must be fulfilled prior to the Lord's return. You must choose one or the other as they contradict each other. To choose the pretrib doctrine is to deny Biblical inspiration of the scriptures.

II. Three Biblical Warnings

Jesus, Paul and Peter warn Christians against embracing expectations similar to the Pretrib theory.

The Warning of Christ

In the Olivet Discourse Jesus warned about false teachings concerning His coming. He pointed out three types of error. (1) The teaching that He would come during the 70th week of Daniel – Mt. 24:21-23; (2) The teaching that His disciples would have to gather themselves unto Him in some remote parts of the earth – Mt. 24:26a; (3) The teaching that Christ would come secretly – Mt. 24:26b;

In response to each of these errors Christ immediately responds beginning with the last stated error unto the first. (1) He will not come secretly but His coming will be obvious and evident as lightening that shineth East to West – Mt. 24:26; (2) His disciples will not have to gather themselves to Him unto some remote desert or parts of the earth but they will be gathered together upon Him as eagles in flight gather together upon a carcass – Mt. 24:28; (3) He will not come before or during the tribulation period but “immediately after the tribulation of those days....” – Mt. 24:29-31.

The Lord uses two metaphors to answer the two final errors (lightening; eagles with carcass) but in regards to the error dealing with the exact timing He responds by exact time reference – “*immediately AFTER the tribulation*”. Some argue that the eagles refer to the battle of Armageddon. However, in that battle there is more than one carcass. Christ has all the eagles in flight gathering upon ONE carcass in Matthew 24:28. This is a metaphor of the rapture as further explained in Matthew 24:30-31.

The Warning of Peter

Peter predicts some scoffers that will appear AFTER his own decease in what he calls “the last days” (2 Pt. 3:1-8). There are two aspects that form the basis for their scoffing. First they argue evolutionary principle of uniformitarians. All things continue without any disruption or Divine intervention. Second, the basis of their scoffing is the fact that Peter

predicts that a long period of time will occur between the time that the Lord ascended into heaven and the days of these scoffers. Indeed, the whole basis for their scoffing is this long extended gap between the promise and the yet unfulfillment of such a promise. They point out the “*promise*” of His coming demanded He would come “*quickly*” and yet the long period of time that has elapsed contradicts this “*promise*.”

Peter responds to both arguments. First, he points out that they are ignorant of a previous day of judgment by worldwide flooding and therefore are ignorant of another world wide judgment yet to come by fire at the Lord’s return. Second, he tells Christians not to count or reckon the promise of the Lord to come “*quickly*” according to how humans “*count*” time but rather according to how God count’s time (v. 8). Two thousand years to complete a promise of quickness is not how we count quickness. However, God considers a thousand years as one day. Hence, according to how God counts time, Jesus has only been gone a couple of days. Third, he responds that the “longsuffering” of the Lord is salvation for those coming generations of mankind in which God’s elect are to be found. Christ will not return until all the elect are saved.

The Pretrib doctrine of imminence is based upon the very same principle of interpretation that scoffers use to deny His promise to be true. Pretribbers argue that “*quickly*” can only mean imminent. They argue that “*looking for*” Christ is to demand an imminent expectation. This is exactly how the scoffers counted the promise of Christ. Peter goes on to define “looking for” something to be consistent with not only a Posttrib expectation but a Post-millennial expectation of a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pet. 3:12-14). Hence, Peter denies that such terms are terms of imminence. The posttrib position counts such time terms as God reckons them rather than how scoffers and pretribbers reckon them. Peter warns

us not to be ignorant of this very thing and this is the very ignorance that the Pretrib position is based on.

The Warning of Paul

In 2 Thessalonians 1-2 the apostle explicitly condemns the Pretrib theory as heresy that should be avoided by all means. These two chapters are the foremost arguments presented against the Pretrib theory in the New Testament.

In 2 Thessalonians 1:6-7 Paul plainly states that there will be no rest for church saints until Jesus is revealed from heaven with His angels taking flaming fire upon the ungodly. The Greek grammar demands that the time of rest from tribulation occurs simultaneous with the revelation of Christ from heaven in flaming fire. Christ does not come in flaming fire from heaven at the supposed Pretrib coming. This is a secret coming according to Pretribbers. Yet, Paul insists that the churches do not rest from, that is, they do not escape tribulation until the Posttrib coming of Christ. Second, the day of rest from tribulation is also the day of their glorification in verse 10. Grammatically the “*when*” of verse 10 refers back to the “*when*” in verse 7 as the same time of rest in verse 7. It is this “*day*” that continues to be the theme of chapter two verses one through three. If there is no “*rest*” from tribulation until the Posttrib coming then there is no rapture, no resurrection, and no glorification until the Posttrib coming.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-8 is the strongest passage in the Bible against the Pretrib theory. In verse one the grammatical rule known as the *Grandville Sharpe Rule* demands that the “*coming*” and “*gathering together*” occur as one event, not two.

In verse two the apostolic warning is against any kind of communication that would declare that the “*day of Christ is at hand*”. The terms “*day of Christ*” are used only six times previous to this passage and all by Paul. In all previous six times it refers to the day of the rapture and resurrection. Paul is making it clear that the “*day*” in chapter two verse 10 is the day He is continuing to speak of in chapter two verses 1-3. What the King James translates as “*is at hand*” Dr. Lightfoot the great Greek grammarian translates as “*is imminent*.”

The problem was that some in the church at Thessalonica had quit working altogether and were living off others and even encouraging others to stop working because of the imminence (v. 2) of “*our gathering together unto Him*” (v. 1). Some religious fanatics in Arkansas convinced some people of the same idea. They all sold their belongings and started looking up waiting to be raptured because some nut told them that the time for the rapture had arrived and therefore they should forsake all worldly ventures (working at their job, family duties, going to school, etc.). There were those who did not accept this view and were struggling to stop it from spreading over the church. In short, this false teaching tore the church apart and caused anxiety and confusion.

Paul warns them not to believe any writing or anyone that says “*the day of Christ is at hand*.” Indeed he says “*let no man deceive you by any means*” (v. 2a). He says that “*the day of Christ*” (v. 2) identified as “our gathering together (v. 1) shall not come except two events occur first. (1) The great apostasy; (2) the revelation of the great apostate.

Paul goes on to deal with both of these preceding events in verses 4-12. He deals with the last stated event first (vv. 4-8) and then deals with the great apostasy (vv. 9-12).

In dealing with the great apostate he also speaks of what is withholding the apostate from being revealed. He told the

church that when he was with them he had taught them these things (v. 4). The New Testament was not written yet. Paul used the scriptures (Old Testament) to teach the churches along with new revelation God had given them.

In the Old Testament book of end times events – Daniel – God gives Daniel the precise order of kingdoms that would arise right up to the kingdom of God (chs. 2,8,9,10-11). Daniel also reveals in chapter ten the restraining force that keeps these kingdoms in check until it is their time to arise. That restraining force is the angelic host of God – particularly the arch angel Michael (Dan. 10:21-22). Paul tells them that the Antichrist cannot arise and will not be revealed until it is his time. The one restraining him was well known to the readers of Daniel. Daniel speaks of this antichrist more than once (ch. 7, 11).

Paul's point is very simple, the day of our gathering together unto Christ cannot be considered imminent ("*is at hand*") until after two major unfulfilled prophecies occur. Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 24:22-31. From God's perspective it has been and will come "*quickly*" and will "*shortly come to pass.*" However, from our perspective, we cannot be looking for Christ if we are not looking for those things that herald and announce His coming. These preceding heralds are considered part of "*His coming*" just as the coming of ancient kings included the heralds that went out before them and announced their imminent arrival. His coming or *parousia* includes both the heralds and His appearance.

There is only one parable that Jesus commanded His disciples to "*learn.*" Pretribbers have never learned this parable. This parable is the parable of "*all the trees*" (Lk. 21:29). The parable is simple and straight forward. You cannot be looking for summer if you are not looking for those things that precede and herald its approach – SO

LIKEWISE, you cannot be looking for the coming of the Lord if you are not also looking for those things that precede and herald His appearance.

III. The Follies of Pretrib Arguments

The only way that Pretribbism can be defended is by mishandling the Scriptures and by blindly accepting illogical arguments. For example:

1. The “not appointed to wrath” argument:

Pretribbers argue that children of God cannot enter the tribulation period because God has not appointed us to wrath. For this argument to be true two things must also be true: (1) Wrath and Tribulation must be synonymous; (2) There must be no children of God in the tribulation.

The folly of this argument is shown by the fact there all parties agree there are children of God in the tribulation (Rev. 7, 12, 17-18). Second, tribulation is from the world and Satan upon God’s children whereas wrath is from God upon the world and Satan. Revelation 9:20-21 and Revelation 16:1-17 make it very clear that the objects of God’s wrath are the non-elect. Can God spare His children from such wrath? Ask Moses when he was in Egypt. Can God supply the needs of His people when none can buy or sell? Ask Moses when he was in the wilderness for forty years? Finally, all the proof texts used to support this “wrath” argument are taken from contexts where deliverance is from eternal wrath through the cross.

2. The Kept from “tribulation” argument:

Pretrib theologians argue that Revelation 3:10 and the words “**keep you from**” means the promise of a rapture out of the world before the tribulation occurs. How can anyone interpret Rev. 3:10 in such a way that it has no literal application to the very historical and literal church it is addressed to? This is exactly what the Pretrib interpretation of this text does. That literal church was not raptured! However, it was preserved through tribulation that came upon the earth under ten different Roman persecutions. Jesus uses the same disputed words in John 17 and there he says that the Father would not “**take them out of the**

world” but rather that He would “*keep them from*” the evil one while in the world. Jesus is the speaker in both cases and uses the same words in both cases. He defines “*keep from*” in contrast to “*take out of the world.*” However, Pretribbers interpret “keep from” to mean “*take out of the world*” by rapture. We prefer to the meaning Christ gives to these words. Not only so, but the basis for this promise in Revelation 3:10 is the very same basis applied to tribulation saints in Revelation 14:12.

3. The Absence of the word “church” in Revelation 4-20:

They build a case out silence in regard to the word “church” in Revelation 4-20. Since the word “*church*” is not found in these chapters they conclude it must not exist on earth during this time. However, these same chapters include heavenly scenes and there is no “*church*” mentioned in heaven either. Moreover, this does not stop Pretribbers from finding the church in Revelation chapters 4 and 19-20!!! They have no problem finding the church in both passages under different terms (“*John*” and “*bride*”). How then can they object to Posttribbers finding the church under terms used commonly throughout the scriptures for church saints (saints, elect, etc.). The absence of the term “*church*” is easily accounted for. The historical meaning of the term “*ekklesia*” translated church implies a PUBLIC meeting. It should be obvious that in such a time of persecution that no public assemblies will be found as they will not be tolerated.

4. The Thief Coming Argument:

Pretribbers argue that Christ’s coming must be *imminent* because He comes “*as a thief in the night.*” Since a thief

does not announce the time of his coming then the rapture coming Christ can never be known and thus must always be imminent.

However, what the Pretribber fails to see is that each and every text where this metaphor is found it is always applied to those who DO NOT WATCH. It is said of the good man of the house that if he had known what hour the thief came HE WOULD HAVE WATCHED – meaning he did not watch. In Revelation 3:3 Christ's says, "*If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.*" If you don't watch you can't know. In Revelation 16:15 Christ says, "*Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.*" The point is that if you are watching you won't be taken by surprise but if you do not watch you be taken by surprise. When guards were found sleeping the captain of the guard would set the sleeper's clothes on fire and put him to open shame.

However, those who are watching, the Apostles says, "*But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief*" (1 Thes. 5:4).

Therefore, this argument does not prove another secret coming in addition to the kingdom coming. Neither does this argument prove an imminent coming that can never be known by anyone. Indeed, this metaphor is to motivate us to WATCH for these things to begin so that we might KNOW in advance that He is coming – "*And WHEN these things begin to come to pass THEN look up and lift up your heads for your redemption draweth nigh.*" – Lk. 21:28

5. Going up just to come down argument:

Pretribbers argue that it makes no sense for us to be raptured up to Christ in the clouds only to come right back down. What is the point of the rapture if we come right back down?

The Greek term translated “*meet*” was commonly used of the Roman Legions who came back to Rome after a victory. They would camp about a mile from Rome. Heralds would be sent to announce their arrival. All the citizens would prepare for the entrance of the army into the city. First, every citizen would go out of the city and meet the army and then turn around and accompany the army into the city. Why? Because this going out to “*meet*” the army and returning with it was an act of giving honor and glory to the victorious general and his army. This is the picture behind the rapture and the term “*meet*”. Likewise, in the last chapter of Acts when Paul had come to the apian way that led to Rome. The members of the church at Rome came out to “*meet*” Paul only to escort him back to Rome. They were showing him honor and respect.

Moreover, we are raptured up to meet the Lord in the air because at the same instant of the rapture, the Lord pours out his wrath upon the Antichrist at Armageddon.

6. A Posttrib rapture leaves none to enter the Millennium:

Some argue that if the rapture occurs at the Posttrib time then all saints would be raptured and none would be left to enter the kingdom on earth.

However, the scriptures clearly teach that at the rapture all Israel is saved on earth (Rev. 1:7; Rev. 14:1-5). Moreover, Zechariah 14 states that there are remnants of the nations that did not go up to Armageddon and that these would enter

the kingdom. Apparently they are saved along with the Jews. Revelation 1:7 infers that more than those who pierced Him would mourn and be saved.

IV. The Pretrib Confusion about the Great Tribulation

Pretribbers equate the 70th week of Daniel with the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord. They believe they are synonymous. However, the Great Tribulation occurs within the 70th week of Daniel and is a period of days that are “shortened” for the elect’s sake while the 70th week is a fixed seven year period. Furthermore, certain celestial signs occur “immediately after the tribulation of those days” (Mt. 23:29) but occur before the day of the Lord (Joel 2:31 with Rev. 6:12,17). The Great Tribulation does not begin until the middle of the 70th week with the revelation of the Antichrist (Mt. 24:15-29 with Dan. 12:11-12). It is concluded by these celestial signs which in turn introduce the day of the Lord. Any way you look at it, the Great Tribulation and the 70th week and the Day of the Lord are not one and the same. Both the great tribulation and the day of the Lord occur within the latter half of the 70th week. However, they are separated by specific celestial signs.

70TH WEEK OF DANIEL

(-----first half-----/---(tribulation)—(signs)—(day of the Lord)

the 7th trump covers a long period of days (Rev. 10:7). Also because the sixth trump is called the second woe (Rev. 9:12) and immediately prior to the 7th trump it is announced that the third woe cometh (Rev. 11:14-15). That scenario would look as follows



Others would place the seven trumps under the 7th seal and the seven vials under the 7th trump. However, all the seven's usher in the kingdom.

