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4 | Israel, the Church, and the Last Half
of Daniel's 70th Week — *Travis M. Snow*

16 | The Cutting Short of the Antichrist's
Great Tribulation — *Dr. Alan E. Kurschner*

32 | Letters of Encouragement

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Table of Contents

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Israel, the Church, and the Last Half of Daniel's 70th Week

Travis M. Snow



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Biblical Prophecy Magazine

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Israel, the Church, and the Last Half of Daniel's 70th Week

— Travis M. Snow

This article explores the biblical teaching of the church's relationship to the 70th week of Daniel, in particular whether the Bible teaches that the church will endure the entire last half of the 70th week of Daniel as posttribulationists contend, or rather be raptured into heaven sometime before the 70th week completely ends as prewrath contends.

There are many similarities between the traditional posttribulation and prewrath rapture positions. In contrast to pretribulationism, advocates of both posttribulationism and prewrath believe the church will face the Antichrist and experience his great tribulation, which is referenced by Jesus in Matt 24:21. Likewise, both posttribulationism and prewrath maintain that the Antichrist's war against "the saints"

(*hagios*) in Rev 13:7 relates to his persecution of the church. As we will discover, this conclusion is reached because the Greek term *hagios* is a reference for the church throughout the New Testament (e.g. Acts 9:13; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2). Because of the way proponents of posttribulation and prewrath eschatology interpret these New Testament texts, there is also common ground in the two camps regarding the pastoral implications of the biblical data. Overall, posttribulationism and prewrath emphasize that Christians need to prepare now to endure the difficult events of the last-days tribulation, even if this means suffering extreme persecution, imprisonment, and death.

In spite of these similarities, there are also significant points of disagreement between those who hold to a posttribulation versus prewrath rapture. For example,

posttribulationism typically argues that Christians will endure all of Daniel's 70th week (aka "the seven-year tribulation"). In other words, posttribulationists believe Christians will remain on the earth for the entire seven-year period before Jesus establishes his messianic kingdom, which also leads to the related belief that the rapture will not take place until *the end* of this seven-year period. Posttribulationists also believe that after the rapture Christians will meet Jesus in the sky and then immediately return with him to *the earth* to rule and reign. Prewrath, on the other hand, interprets the biblical texts related to Daniel's 70th week differently. Whereas posttribulationism argues that the church will endure all of Daniel's 70th week, prewrath argues that the rapture will take place before Daniel's 70th week ends.

Again, there is no disagreement among proponents of posttribulationism and prewrath that Christians will face the Antichrist, which is why no one in these camps supports a pretribulation or midtribulation rapture. However, unlike posttribulationism, prewrath sees many pieces of biblical data that either directly or indirectly require a rapture of the church after the mid-point of Daniel's 70th week, but before the 70th week fully expires. From a prewrath vantage point, the rapture of the church could theoretically take place at any moment after the midpoint of Daniel's 70th week, but before the 70th week is over.

The way in which prewrath advocates construct their eschatological timeline in relation to Daniel's 70th week and the rapture also leads to another major point of divergence when compared to posttribulationism. Prewrath proponents believe that, after the rapture, Jesus will take the church into the Father's presence *in heaven* and only return to the earth with his saints at a later point. Thus, within prewrath circles, though it is accepted that there is only one second coming, called the Parousia of Jesus, it is also accepted that the Parousia will involve a complex, extended series of events that will span many months. The rapture will begin the Parousia. Then, the inhabitants of the earth will experience a time of God's wrath, and only much later will Jesus descend from heaven with Christians to rescue Israel, defeat the Antichrist, and reign from Jerusalem (Rev 19).



The Importance of Daniel's 70th Week for Rapture Timing

This overview of posttribulation eschatology vis-à-vis prewrath eschatology demonstrates the centrality of Daniel's 70th week in discussions of rapture timing. If we conclude that the 70th week applies in its totality to the church, we will naturally land on the posttribulation position. If, on the other hand, we conclude that the 70th week may not apply to the church in the same way it does to the nation of Israel and the rest of the world, then the door is left open for the prewrath position to become a viable option.

In the remainder of this article, we will look at a number of key biblical texts that detail Daniel's 70th week, and more specifically, the last half of Daniel's 70th week (i.e. the last three-and-a-half years). These texts include Dan 9:24; 7:25; 12:7; 12:11–12, and Rev 12:1–16; 13:5–7; and 11:1–10. Throughout the course of analyzing these texts, we will see that, contrary to the posttribulation position, there is no passage in Scripture that applies Daniel's 70th week in its entirety to the church. In other words, Scripture never teaches the church must be on the earth throughout the entire last half of Daniel's 70th week.

Instead, in every place where the last half of Daniel's 70th week is outlined via a specific time reference, these time references are used to indicate the experience of the *nation of Israel*, not the church. What this means is that, even though the nation of Israel will have to go through all of the 70th week on the earth, it does not automatically follow that the church will have to do so as well because the Bible never states

this. Moreover, as we will also discover, there are many other texts besides the various 70th week texts that even more directly demonstrate that the church will be raptured into heaven before the 70th week completely ends. In the latter half of this article, we will analyze some of these texts as well, including Matt 24:22, 24:42–44, and John 14:1–6.

The 70th Week in Daniel 9:24–27

The central text for any study of Daniel’s 70th week is Dan 9:24–27. At the beginning of this prophecy, the angel Gabriel tells Daniel in verse 24:

Seventy weeks have been appointed for your people and your holy city, to finish transgression, to make an end of sin, to purge iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal the vision and the prophet, and to anoint a most holy place (author’s translation).

Two foundational features are worth noting in this text. First, the “seventy weeks” were “appointed” for Daniel’s “people and his holy city.” From the outset, this communicates that Daniel’s 70th week is related to God’s eschatological plan for the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem. Second, the 70 weeks will be central in God’s plan to bring the nation of Israel and the city of Jerusalem into a state of righteousness, so they can fulfill their God-given calling in the kingdom of God. The 70th week in particular will refine Israel, sanctify the nation, and position them in such a way that they can enter into their God-ordained destiny in the messianic age. The book of Daniel was written before the church as we know it in the New Testament sense existed. Thus, one could reasonably argue that we cannot build our entire doctrine of who must endure the entire 70th week from Dan 9 alone. This is a fair point, and no doubt, we must look at all of the biblical data when approaching this issue. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the core 70th week prophecy applies the 70 weeks to the Jewish nation specifically, not to anyone else.

The Last 3.5 Years and Daniel 7:25

Another important prophecy outlines the actions of the Antichrist during the last half of the 70th week. This prophecy can be found in Dan 7:25. Here, Daniel is told that the Antichrist:

Will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law, and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.¹

Daniel 7:25 is cited by posttribulationists to justify the view that the church will be on the earth for the entire last half of Daniel’s 70th week.² This line of reasoning is rooted in the idea that “the saints” in this verse must naturally include the church.

The same term for “saints” is also used in Dan 7:21–22, which describes that the Antichrist:

“Was waging war with the saints and overpowering them until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom” (cf. Dan 7:27).

It is true that the “time, times, and half a time” language in Dan 7:25 is a reference to the last half of the 70th week, however, it cannot be so easily proven that the term “saints” in this passage refers to either the church, or to all the people of God in a general sense. Rather, a much stronger case can be made that the term “saints” in Dan 7:25 (cf. 7:21–22; 7:27) denotes the nation of Israel, God’s “holy people.” The message of Dan 7:25 is that the Antichrist will wear down and persecute the Jewish nation (the saints) for three-and-a-half years.

The Aramaic and Hebrew Term ‘Saints’

Support for the view that the term “saints” in Dan 7 should be read as a reference for the Jewish nation can be found when we analyze this term in more detail. The Aramaic word in Dan 7:25 for “saints” is *qaddiysh*, which corresponds to the Hebrew terms *qadosh* and *qodesh*, both of which are used numerous times in

¹ All Scripture cited throughout is from the NASB unless otherwise noted.

² For example, posttribulationists such as Douglas Moo view the “saints” in Dan 7:25 as “the people of God” by which he means the church (“A Posttribulation Response,” in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pretribulationism, Prewrath, Or Posttribulationism*, 2nd ed., edited by Alan Hultberg [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 92).

"These words *qaddiysh/qadosh* are generally related to the concept of holiness. They are derived from the root *qadash* which means to set apart or sanctify."

the book of Daniel.³ These words *qaddiysh/qadosh* are generally related to the concept of holiness. They are derived from the root *qadash* which means to set apart or sanctify. In Daniel, we find the Aramaic term *qaddiysh* used multiple times when the Babylonian kings describe "the holy gods" (4:8–9; 5:11), or a "holy one," meaning an angel (4:13; 4:23). Similarly, there are numerous instances in the book of Daniel where the related Hebrew term *qodesh* is used to describe the people of Israel, the city of Jerusalem, the temple, and the biblical covenants. For example, in Dan 8:13–14 and 9:24 the Lord's "sanctuary" is called the *qodesh* (i.e. holy place). In Dan 9:16, 9:20, and 11:45, Jerusalem is called God's "holy (*qodesh*) mountain." In Dan 11:28 and 11:30, God's covenant with Israel is called the "holy (*qodesh*) covenant." And perhaps most importantly, in Dan 8:24, 9:24, and 12:7 the Jews are called God's "holy (*qadosh/qodesh*) people."

This survey demonstrates that throughout the book of Daniel the collection of Aramaic and Hebrew words that denote holiness frequently occurs in contexts in which the nation of Israel, the city of Jerusalem, the Jerusalem temple, and/or God's covenant with the Jews is the topic of discussion. As a result, when we see the repeated references to the "holy ones" or "saints" (*qaddiysh*) in Dan 7:22–27, it is most contextually consistent to interpret this word as a reference to national-ethnic Israel, that is to say, as a reference to the Jewish people as a whole.

Israel's Holy Calling in the Torah

There are numerous places in the Old Testament where the attribute of holiness is applied to the people

³ Daniel 2:4–7:28 was written in Aramaic, whereas the other portions of the book were written in Hebrew.

of Israel. One of the best examples is Exod 19:6, where God called Israel to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy (*qadosh*) nation." Also, in Lev 19:2 we read: "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to all the congregation of Israel and say to them, "You shall be holy (*qadosh*), for I the LORD your God am holy.'" One of the reasons some people get tripped up over the idea that "the saints" in Dan 7 represent the entire Jewish nation is because, in English, we often associate the concept of holiness primarily with righteous behavior. Therefore, because the entire nation of Israel did not walk in righteousness in Old Testament times, we might find it hard to fathom that they could be called "the holy ones" (i.e. saints) in the book of Daniel. In other words, we might be prone to read "the holy ones" as though these are a more righteous subset either within the nation of Israel or even within the church. In Hebrew and Aramaic, the root *qadash*, and its related terms, generally just means *to set something apart*. It denotes a vocational calling of service unto the Lord.

When Dan 7:21–27 then calls the people of Israel God's "holy ones," this verse is simply harkening back to Israel's original vocational calling in the Torah and to the time when they were originally called God's "holy nation" (Exod 19:6; Lev 19:2), irrespective of their behavior. Jewish people are God's "holy ones," not fundamentally because of how they act but because of the identity God gave them in the Torah. The holy God called Israel and placed his name upon them, so they are holy (i.e. set apart for a distinct purpose). Daniel 7 affirms this message and consistently refers to Israel as God's "saints" or "holy ones" (*qaddiysh*).

Many scholars accordingly have recognized that the attribute of holiness, which is applied to ethnic Israel in Dan 7, is rooted in the nation's previous vocational



calling in the Torah. For instance, J. Paul Tanner writes,

The idea of God’s holy people derives from the fact that Israel was called to be a “holy nation” (*goy qadosh*) in Exod 19:6 and a “holy people” (*am qadosh*) in Deut 7:6 and 26:19. Cf. Pss 16:3 and 34:10.⁴

Word Study Fallacies and Daniel 7:25

Another reason Christians are prone to read “the saints” in Dan 7 as a reference to the church is because the church, that is to say, members of the New Covenant *ekklesia*, are identified numerous times in the New Testament as “the saints” (Greek: *hagios*; e.g. Acts 9:13; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2). Thus, the meaning of the term “saints” in the New Testament is often read back into Dan 7, which then leads to the conclusion that this verse teaches that the entire church will be persecuted by the Antichrist for the full 3.5 years that make up the last half of Daniel’s 70th week.

Later we will look at how the New Testament situates New Covenant “saints” (*hagios*) in relation to Daniel’s 70th week. Suffice it to say, that reading a New Testament definition of a Greek term (“saints,” *hagios*) back into the Old Testament when interpreting a Hebrew/Aramaic term (*qaddiysh*) is poor exegetical methodology. Conflation is present when two separate things are regarded as though they are the same just

because they may have some surface-level similarities. The tendency to conflate the New Testament Greek use of “saints” (*hagios*) with the Hebrew/Aramaic “saints” (*qaddiysh*) in Dan 7:25 is an example of a lexical fallacy according to New Testament scholar D. A. Carson. He explains that it is “methodologically irresponsible to read the meaning of a Hebrew [or Aramaic] word into its New Testament Greek equivalent.” Clearly, the reverse is also true because words can have different meanings in different contexts and different periods.⁵

Consider this example: In the New Testament, the church is frequently called the *ekklesia* in Greek. *Ekklesia* was a common Greek term for an assembly of people. It was used to describe civic, religious, and political bodies in the first century. In the Old Testament, the “assembly” of Israel is often called the *qahal*. Notably however, when the translators of the Greek Septuagint (LXX) were translating the Hebrew Bible into Greek, they often used the Greek term *ekklesia* to describe the assembly (*qahal*) of Israel (Deut 18:16, 1 Kgs 8:14). Does this mean the New Testament church (*ekklesia*) is the same thing as the Old Testament assembly (*qahal/ekklesia*) of Israel? Of course not, because a contextual study of the *qahal/ekklesia* of Israel and the *ekklesia* of the New Testament reveals that these are two separate entities.

⁴ J. Paul Tanner, *Daniel: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2020), 447.

⁵ D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 62.

The former was a geopolitical and national body made up primarily of people from one ethnic group, whereas the latter is an international and transhistorical spiritual body of Jews and Gentiles who are united through their faith in Jesus. We cannot conflate the Old Testament *qahal/ekklesia* (assembly) of Israel and the New Testament *ekklesia* (assembly of believers) just because they are described using the same word. Words can have different meanings in different contexts and periods.

This principle also holds true when looking at “the saints” in Dan 7. Just because New Covenant believers are called “the saints” (Greek: *hagios*) in the New Testament does not mean “the saints” (*qaddiysh*; LXX: *hagios*) in Daniel must be the same group of people. To say otherwise is to commit a lexical fallacy of interpretation, one based on the false premise that the meaning of a Greek term in the New Testament can automatically be read back into the Old Testament. There is no evidence within the book of Daniel, or in the entire Old Testament, that the saints in Dan 7:25 could be anyone other than the nation of Israel writ large—the Jews, God’s “holy” people who were originally given this title back in Exod 19:6.

In regards to the last 3.5 years of Daniel’s 70th week, the only thing we can deduce with certainty from Dan 7 is that the nation of Israel will suffer at the hands of the Antichrist for the duration of this time. This passage is silent concerning where the church will be during this time and thus for that one needs to turn to the New Testament. As a result, we shouldn’t use Dan 7 as a posttribulation proof-text to justify the argument that the church must be on the earth for the entire 70th week of Daniel. Such an idea is never stated anywhere in the book of Daniel.

The Last Half of the 70th Week in Daniel 12

After Dan 9:24 and 7:25, the next place in Daniel where a specific time reference is given in relation to the 70th week is in Dan 12:7 and 12:11–12: These verses read, respectively:

I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, as he raised his right hand and his left towards heaven, and swore by Him who

lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time; and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed.

From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination is set up, there will be 1,290 days. How blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 1,335 days.

Daniel 12:7 reiterates in Hebrew the same basic message as Dan 7:25, which is evident through the repetition of the “time, times, and half a time” terminology, as well as through the reference to the “shattering the power of the holy people.” The “holy people” (*am qodesh*) in Dan 12 are depicted using the Hebrew equivalent of the Aramaic term from Dan 7:25 (*qaddiysh*).

Also of particular note, the Hebrew construction for “holy people” (*am qodesh*) in Dan 12:7 is almost identical to the Hebrew construction in Exod 19:6, where Israel was called God’s “holy nation” (*goy qadosh*). This is further proof that the three-and-a-half year time designation (time, times, and half a time) in Dan 7:25 and 12:7 is outlining Israel’s experience before the messianic age. This is the demarcated period of time during which Israel will be refined and disciplined, having their strength shattered during the last three-and-a-half years of the Antichrist’s reign.

Overall, this survey of key texts in Daniel that cover the 70th week (Dan 9:24; 7:25; 12:7) demonstrates that every time there is a specific time reference used in this particular book, these time references describe the duration of Israel’s experience prior to the second coming. Of course, this doesn’t necessarily prove one thing or another regarding the church’s experience during this time. However, the book of Daniel never expressly teaches that the church must be on the earth for the entire last half of the 70th week. Such a view, typically maintained by posttribulationists, is rooted in numerous interpretive fallacies and is an example of what happens when New Testament theology is too quickly read back into the Old Testament without any exegetical basis. The book of Daniel is focused on the experience of national Israel and the city of Jerusalem.

The 70th Week in Revelation 12–13

The book of Revelation also contains a number of references to the last three-and-a-half years of Daniel's 70th week. The beginning of the vision in Rev 12 summarizes how "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her a head a crown of twelve stars" gave birth to the Messiah. Some Christian commentators have attempted to spiritualize this vision as though it refers to the church. But this is an awkward and unjustifiable approach, because the church did not give birth to the Messiah. The people of Israel gave birth to the Messiah, which means the woman in Rev 12 represents the Jewish nation, while her "crown of twelve stars" symbolizes the twelve tribes of Israel. Revelation 12:6 says this woman (i.e. Israel) will be persecuted by Satan and have "a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days." Revelation 12:14 then picks up the same story and says the woman will "fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent."

Given the tribulational context of Revelation, as well as the links back to the book of Daniel, the most natural reading of this vision is that it describes how a remnant within the Jewish nation will flee "into the wilderness" during the last 3.5 years of the Antichrist's reign. There, this Jewish remnant will be protected and preserved by God until the reign of the Antichrist is over. Revelation 12:14 uses the same "time and times and half a time" terminology from Dan 7:25 and 12:7. Revelation 12:6 also references 1,260 of the 1,290–1,335 days from Dan 12:11–12. The days are probably shorter in this context because the 1,260 days represent the time that will lead up to Israel's deliverance by the Messiah in the wilderness, whereas the 1,290–1,335 days represent the time it will take for Jesus to reach Jerusalem, defeat the Antichrist, purify the temple from the abomination of desolation, and fully institute his kingdom.

In any case, the key point to gather from Rev 12 is that the 70th week time designations from Daniel are said to relate to Israel's experience, not to the church's experience. This is a fascinating detail, because we might reasonably expect that if the church was to

be on the earth for the entire 70th week, the book of Revelation would make this clear, primarily because it was written "for the churches" (Rev 22:16).

Yet, Revelation never describes the experience of the church using the specific 70th week time designations from Daniel. Once again, in Revelation, these specific 70th week time designations only describe Israel's experience. It is noteworthy that in Rev 12:17 we are told that due to Israel's preservation in the wilderness, the dragon "went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus." This verse refers to the Antichrist's persecution of the church, a topic that is expounded upon in Rev 13:7. What is particularly interesting is that here in Rev 12:17 the Antichrist's persecution of the church is demarcated *from* his persecution of Israel. Again, no time reference is given for the persecution in Rev 12:17 in contrast to what we see in Rev 12:6 and 12:14 when the persecution of Israel is discussed.

The War on the Church in Revelation 13

Revelation 13 definitely indicates that the church will go through the time of tribulation initiated by the Antichrist. In this passage we are told that the Antichrist will have "authority to act for forty-two months" (Rev 13:5). We are also told in Rev 13:7 that "it was given to him [the Antichrist] to make war with the saints (*hagios*), and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him." These two verses in Rev 13 have typically led posttribulationists to the conclusion that the church will suffer along with Israel for the entire last three-and-a-half years of the Antichrist's reign, that is to say, for the forty-two months of Rev 13:5, the 1,260 days of Rev 12:6, and the "time, and times and half a time" of Rev 13:14 (cf. Dan. 7:25, 12:7). But does the text actually say this? The simple answer is no.

Interestingly, when Rev 13:7 speaks of the Antichrist "making war with the saints," who in a New Testament context must be understood as New Covenant believers (i.e. the church), there is no time designation given. We are never told for how long the Antichrist will persecute the church. In terms of specific time designations, all Revelation says is that the Antichrist

will have authority for forty-two months and that he will persecute Israel for the duration of this time (Rev 12). There is not one place in Revelation where the specific time designations related to the last half of the 70th week, originally introduced in the book of Daniel, are applied in their entirety to the church. As a matter of fact, Revelation is consistent in only applying these time designations to Israel and only speaking more generally of the church's time of suffering during the final tribulation.

We cannot deny that the church will begin to suffer at the hands of the Antichrist starting at the midpoint. However, Scripture does not allow us to say exactly how long this period of suffering *for the church* will last. The traditional posttribulation view that the church must suffer for the entire last half of the 70th week is not explicitly supported by any biblical text. Moreover, if the church is to suffer for the duration of the 70th week, then it seems odd that Revelation would leave this important piece of information out, especially because it so closely links Israel's time of suffering to the church's time of suffering in Rev 12–13. It seems Revelation makes an intentional and important distinction in terms of how John wanted to present the last half of the 70th week in relation to Israel's and the church's experiences.

The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11:1–10

The other direct reference to the last half of Daniel's 70th week in Revelation can be found in Rev 11:2–3. This portion of Revelation outlines the ministry of the "Two Witnesses" who will have miraculous powers for 1,260 days (Rev 11:3). We are also told in this same context that the "temple" and the "holy city" will be handed over to and desecrated by the nations for "forty-two months." Debate continues over the identity of the Two Witnesses, but if we take the text at face value it is clear that they are "two prophets" (11:10) who testify against the world and the Antichrist at some point during the final seven-year period before the Messiah returns. Moreover, the two-fold reference to the 1,260 days and forty-two months during which they will prophesy in all likelihood links their ministry to the last half of Daniel's 70th week, primarily because this language directly mirrors the 70th week language we see in the next vision, in Rev 12, and also in Daniel.



Once again, however, it is notable that these time designations are not applied to the church in Revelation. Instead, in Rev 11, the 70th week time designations are said to represent the timeframe during

which two individual prophets will minister in the holy city of Jerusalem (11:7–9). It bears repeating that if John meant to communicate that the entire church will endure the last half of Daniel’s 70th week in its totality, then why is there never any specific time designation indicating this in Revelation as there is when the experience of the Two Witnesses and the experience of the Jewish nation are outlined (Rev 11–12)? It is possible these time designations were intentionally not applied to the church by John, probably because he wanted to highlight the distinctions between what the church, the nation of Israel, and the Two Witnesses will experience during the last half of the 70th week.

The ‘Cut Short’ Tribulation and the 70th Week

Besides how the 70th week time references in Daniel and Revelation are never applied to the church, there are other clues in the New Testament that support a prewrath rapture position as opposed to a traditional posttribulation rapture position. In Matt 24:29, Jesus says the rapture will take place “after the tribulation,” the tribulation being the time of persecution believers will endure during the reign of the Antichrist (Matt 24:15–28).

Posttribulationists have typically read this “after the tribulation” language in Matt 24:29 as though it proves a post-70th week rapture.⁶ Posttribulationists believe the “tribulation” Jesus speaks of in Matt 24:29 is the same thing as Daniel’s entire 70th week. This argument is not maintained, because earlier in the same prophecy Jesus explicitly states that “those days [i.e. the days of tribulation] will be cut short for the elect (*eklektos*)” (Matt 24:22). The Greek word for elect (*eklektos*) is used to describe the church throughout the New Testament, which in Matt 24:29 refers to the tribulation events that will end early being “cut short” for the church.

There is no way the 70th week itself could be “cut short” because we are told in numerous places exactly how long it will last (even down to the day), what Israel’s experience will be during this time, and how long the Antichrist will have power over



the earth during the 70th week. With this in mind, when Jesus refers to the tribulation being “cut short” for believers, and believers being raptured “after the tribulation” in Matt 24:29, it is not likely he is using “tribulation” as a technical synonym for the 70th week here, as posttribulationists assume. In reading “after the tribulation” in Matt 24:29 as though this phrase is synonymous with “after the 70th week,” posttribulationists commit the exegetical fallacy known as “false assumptions about technical meaning.”⁷ It appears Jesus was using the phrase “after the tribulation” in a more relative sense in Matt 24:29. He was describing the end of the tribulation for believers, because the days of tribulation will be “cut short” for them and they will be raptured “after” a time of suffering. He was not describing the end of the tribulation or the 70th week for everyone else.

No doubt the tribulation events of Matt 24 will cover parts of the 70th week. But still, Jesus never says the rapture will take place after the “time, times, and half a time” of Daniel, or after the 1,260 days of Revelation. He only says the rapture will take place “after the tribulation” that the church will endure, with no specific time reference mentioned.

⁶ E.g. Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation: A Biblical Examination of Posttribulationism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 91

⁷ Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 45.

Furthermore, because Jesus says this time of tribulation for Christians (his elect) will end early, it is difficult to defend the idea that the time of tribulation for Christians will run all the way to the end of the 70th week, because we are never told anywhere in Scripture that the 70th week will end early. As a matter of fact, there is a repeated refrain throughout the Bible that Israel will have to go through the entire 70th week on the earth, down to the very day. The cutting short language in Matt 24:22 essentially requires that the “after the tribulation” language in Matt 24:29 does not mean “after the 70th week.”

The Son of Man Coming When You Do Not Expect

Like Matt 24:22, another text in Matt 24 also supports the idea that the days of tribulation will be “cut short” for Christians before the complete end of the 70th week. In Matt 24:42, Jesus admonishes his disciples, saying, “Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.” In Matt 24:44 Jesus adds: “For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not think he will.” If the rapture will take place at the end of the 70th week, as posttribulationists argue, this statement by Jesus in Matt 24:42–44 would be unnecessary. After all, we know the 70th week will last for seven years. We also know that from the time the abomination of desolation, outlined in Dan 9:27, 12:11–12, and Matt 24:15, appears in the temple in Jerusalem, there will be three-and-a-half years, or roughly 1,260 days, until Jesus returns to deliver Israel and set up the messianic kingdom. If the rapture takes place at the end of the 70th week, at the same time as all of these other events, then this would mean believers alive during the tribulation would be able to calculate the timing of the rapture, nearly to the very day! They would simply have to calculate 1,260 days from the time of the abomination of desolation to the rapture and return of Jesus. This scenario contrasts with the way Jesus describes his coming *for believers* in Matt 24:42–44. In this passage, Jesus indicates that believers need to stay alert and watchful because we will not know exactly when he is coming for us. This statement lends credibility to the idea that even though believers will be on the earth during the reign of the

Antichrist, as per Matt 24 and Rev 13, Jesus could still come for Christians (via the rapture) at any time after the midpoint of the 70th week.

The traditional posttribulation view, with its rapture after the 70th week, largely renders Jesus’s statement in Matt 24:42–44 meaningless. The posttribulation reading implies that Jesus was basically saying, “stay alert because you don’t know when I’m coming for you, even though I’m coming at the end of the 70th week, which you will be able to precisely calculate.” A much better alternative to this reading is to accept that Jesus meant what he said in Matt 24:42–44. Believers need to stay alert because after the midpoint of the 70th week, the rapture could occur at any number of points in time, because we do not know exactly when the tribulation will be cut short for the elect.

Evidence for a Rapture into Heaven

Another significant problem with the posttribulation (post-70th week) rapture is that this model forces the student of the New Testament to ignore, downplay, and/or reinterpret the several New Testament texts that teach that Jesus will take believers *into heaven* after the rapture. The reason posttribulation proponents are forced to deny this component of the blessed hope is because if the rapture takes place after the 70th week, as they allege, then there would not be any time left for Jesus to take believers into heaven. The end of the 70th week marks the time when Jesus will defeat the Antichrist and set up the messianic kingdom on the earth. If we place the rapture after the 70th week, we are automatically forced to also accept that, after the first resurrection and rapture, believers will meet Jesus in the sky and then return immediately with him to the earth so that he can immediately defeat the powers of darkness and set up his kingdom.

John 14:1–6 is the central New Testament text that proves believers will go into heaven after the rapture. In this passage, Jesus tells his disciples that he is going to “the Father’s house” to prepare a place for them. Then, he tells them, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am you may be also.” Posttribulationists have tried to circumvent the idea that this verse describes how Jesus will take believers into heaven after the rapture. As a result, they are left with the awkward argument

that in John 14:1–6 Jesus was only describing how he would pour out the Holy Spirit after his resurrection, and through this means, bring believers into fellowship with him and the Father.⁸ It is true that later in John 14:16–24 Jesus does speak about sending the Holy Spirit after his departure, but this does not mean the earlier verses (vv. 1–6) are about the same thing.

First, the “Father’s house” is a reference to the heavenly realm, and many scholars have pointed this out. For example, Leon Morris writes: “My Father’s house clearly refers to heaven” and the “reference to the Second Advent [in Jn 14:1–6] should not be missed.”⁹ Second, when Jesus speaks later about sending the Holy Spirit, he says that he and the Father will make their “abode” with believers, whereas in John 14:1–6, Jesus speaks of literally “taking/receiving” believers to a particular place (i.e. the Father’s house). This Greek term “taking/receiving” is *paralambano*, which implies taking a physical person to a physical place in the New Testament. Furthermore, *paralambano* mostly has a positive connotation in the New Testament, which is why John 14 translates it as intimate receiving.¹⁰ There is no passage in the New Testament where receiving the Spirit is defined in terms of Jesus taking (*paralambano*) Christians somewhere, as we see in John 14:1–6. *Paralambano* (take/receive) is, however, used in Matt 24:40–41 when Jesus speaks of taking Christians away from judgment after the rapture, so it is most logically consistent to conclude that the same kind of rapture “taking/receiving” is in view in John 14:1–6.

Jesus teaches in various places (e.g. John 14:1–6; Matt 24:40–41; Rev 7:9–16) that believers will be

⁸ E.g. Michael L. Brown and Craig S. Keener, *Not Afraid of the Antichrist: Why We Don’t Believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture* (Bloomington, MN: Chosen Books, 2019), 158. Keener writes that the Father’s house and Jesus’s coming do not prove that believers go into heaven after the rapture through the Holy Spirit, “since in context they refer to Jesus bringing believers into the Father’s presence by his coming after his resurrection; see John 14:5–6, 18–20, 22–23, 28, 20:22).”

⁹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 567–68.

¹⁰ For discussion of the term *paralambano*, see Alan E. Kurschner, *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord: What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Return of Christ* (Pompton Lakes, NJ: Eschatos Publishing, 2013), 219–20.

taken into heaven *in their physical bodies* at some point after he comes for his church. This poses major problems for those who believe the rapture will take place after the 70th week. If we place the rapture after the 70th week, there is not enough time for this “taking/receiving” into the Father’s house in heaven to occur. Alternatively, the prewrath view maintains that believers will be raptured prior to the complete end of the 70th week, which leaves plenty of time for John 14:1–6 to be fulfilled as written.

Israel, the Church, and the 70th Week

One of the most common errors espoused by many proponents of pretribulation eschatology maintains that because the 70th week was appointed for Israel (Dan 9:24), the church could not be here at all during this time and must therefore be raptured before the 70th week begins. Over the last fifty years, posttribulationists have rightly critiqued this axiom of pretribulation rapture theology and pointed out that there are simply too many biblical texts that indicate the church will experience the 70th week and the reign of the Antichrist, which consequently rules out a pretribulation rapture (i.e. a pre-70th week rapture). As commonly occurs, however, it also seems that in rebuking pretribulation errors related to the 70th week of Daniel, proponents of a posttribulation rapture have in turn committed the opposite error. They have fallen into the ditch on the other side of the road. In contrast to pretribulationism, posttribulationists have concluded that the church must remain on the earth for the entire 70th week of Daniel.

In summary, this assumption at the heart of posttribulation theology is problematic for a number of reasons. First, the specific 70th week time designations from the book of Daniel are never applied directly to the church anywhere in the Bible. Second, there are many New Testament texts that reveal that the last-days tribulation will end early for the church, at which point Christians will be raptured into heaven sometime before the 70th week fully expires. When the evidence is weighed, it appears that the biblical teaching on the rapture falls somewhere between the extremes of pretribulationism and posttribulationism. The church will endure some portion of the 70th week and clearly more than half of it. Yet, God’s

eschatological plan for the church still exists on a slightly different plane than his eschatological plan for unbelieving Israel and the world at large.

This biblical reality has many implications for debates and discussions on eschatology as it proves that some formulation of a prewrath rapture is the most biblical position. It also has implications that concern a number of important biblical texts because these texts can only be interpreted properly if we avoid the mistakes of both pretribulationism and posttribulationism. Last, but not least, the biblical reality related to the church's experience in relation to the 70th week also has profound implications in terms of how we should preach, teach, and share the blessed hope of the Messiah's return.

One of the privileges of being a Christian prior to the second coming is that we are promised a resurrection/ rapture into heaven sometime before the start of the messianic age. No doubt, Christians will suffer much in the days ahead. But the glorious prospect of one day escaping this world and seeing Jesus, the angels, and God the Father in all their heavenly splendor is meant to anchor our too-often troubled hearts with optimism and excitement for what lies ahead.

As Jesus said in John 14:1-3:

Do not let your hearts be troubled; believe in God; believe also in me . . . In my Father's house are many rooms . . . And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you will also be.

According to Jesus, one of the remedies for a troubled heart is to believe that the rapture will rescue the church before his wrath begins. Jesus expects that his people will look forward to the time when he will come again not only to set up his kingdom on the earth, but first to come again and take us into his Father's house in heaven. BP



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Many of us have been told that we will be “raptured out of here before the Antichrist arrives.”

But what if this is wrong?

Is this really what the Bible teaches?

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The **CUTTING SHORT** of the **ANTICHRIST'S** **GREAT TRIBULATION**

— *Dr. Alan E. Kurschner*

This article explains what it means for the Antichrist's great tribulation to be “cut short” and responds to challenges to the prewrath understanding of this event.

A major tenet of prewrath theology is the understanding that the period of the great tribulation against God's elect will be “cut short.” Jesus states, “For then there will be great suffering [i.e. great tribulation, *thlipsis megas*] unlike anything that has happened from the beginning of the world until now, or ever will happen. And if those days had not been cut short [*koloboō*], no one would be saved [i.e. delivered]. But for the sake of the elect [*eklektos*] those days will be cut short [*koloboō*]” (Matt 24:21–22; cf. Mark 13:20).¹ Jesus continues to explain that this cutting short of the great tribulation will occur at an unknown day and hour with his return (Matt 24:36). The same day on

which the elect are rescued will be the day the wicked begin to be judged:

But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet blast, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other (Matt 24:29–31 emphasis added, NASB).

Prewrath eschatology distinguishes the period of Antichrist's great tribulation from the eschatological period known as the day of the Lord's wrath. The object of Antichrist's wrath will be Christians, as well as Israel, who will eventually recognize their

¹ All Scripture translations cited throughout are from the New English Translation unless otherwise indicated.

true Messiah at the end of the 70th week of Daniel. The object of the Lord's wrath will be unbelievers. These two periods will not—and cannot by their purposes—overlap with each other. They will occur back-to-back. Jesus uses several illustrations on this point, e.g. the separation that occurred “just like the days of Noah” (Matt 24:37–39; cf. Luke 17:26—18:8), “one taken and one left” (Matt 24:40–41), and the five wise virgins who were taken and the five who were left (Matt 25:1–13). Prewrath teaches that the great tribulation will be cut short *sometime during the second half* of the 70th week of Daniel when Jesus returns on the clouds at an unknown day and hour.²

Many pretribulation exponents have asserted a misrepresentation of the prewrath view, stating that prewrath teaches the great tribulation will last “21 months” and that the rapture occur at the “three quarter” point during the 70th week. For example, Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum claims that the prewrath view should be called the “three-quarter tribulation” view.³ Fruchtenbaum's misrepresentation of prewrath is in direct contradiction to the actual prewrath view. Immediately after mispresenting his prewrath view, in the *very next* sentence, Fruchtenbaum states Marvin Rosenthal's correct view: “According to Rosenthal, the rapture occurs somewhere between the middle and the end of the Tribulation . . .”⁴ Prewrath teaches, as stated by Rosenthal, that the great tribulation will be cut short *sometime during the second half* of the 70th week of Daniel when Jesus returns in the clouds. The day when it is cut short will be the day that God's eschatological wrath begins. The cutting short of the great tribulation could happen shortly after the midpoint or it could happen toward the end of the second half—or anytime between. We do not know the day or hour.⁵

² Robert Van Kampen, *The Sign*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 282–83; Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), 108–13.

³ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, “Is There a Pre-Wrath Rapture?” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1995), 381–411.

⁴ Fruchtenbaum, “Pre-Wrath Rapture,” 382.

⁵ I stress this point because I have personally corrected pretribulation exponents on this, yet, they regrettably continue to perpetuate this misrepresentation of the prewrath view.

In this article, I intend to accomplish three goals. First, I will explain the meaning of “cut short” in the context of Matt 24:22. Second, I will comment on other relevant passages in Scripture that indicate the great tribulation will be cut short. And third, I will respond to other interpretations of the meaning of the great tribulation being cut short.

The Meaning of ‘Cut Short’ in Matthew 24:22

“For then there will be great suffering unlike anything that has happened from the beginning of the world until now, or ever will happen. And if those days had not been cut short [*koloboō*] no one would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short [*koloboō*]” (Matt 24:21–22).

Our first issue with Matt 24:22 is to examine: (1) its context, and (2) the Greek term *koloboō* (“cut short”) in Matt 24:22.

The Context of Matthew 24:22

In Matt 23, Jesus's conflict with the Jewish leadership came to a climax in Jerusalem as he pronounced woes upon them. In the aftermath of witnessing their teacher condemn the religious leadership, the disciples attempt to salvage something such as their national pride by turning Jesus's attention back upon the beautiful temple (Matt 24:1). Jesus would have none of this. Rather than admiring the temple buildings, he admonished them by beginning his Olivet Discourse: “Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth, not one stone will be left on another. All will be torn down!” (Matt 24:2). In their mind, the disciples associated this future destruction of the temple with the return of Jesus and thus asked, “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign of your coming [*parousia*] and of the end of the age?” (Matt 24:3). In his Olivet Discourse, Jesus challenges their messianic kingdom categories by telling them the kingdom was not coming anytime soon because they must suffer first. Jesus gives an ominous prophecy that believers will have to suffer the beginning of birth pangs (wars, famines, and earthquakes: Matt 24:4–8), which will be followed by the period of great tribulation for Christians, including persecution, martyrdom, hatred, deception, and lawlessness (Matt 24:9–14). Jesus concludes with an exhortation for Christians to endure to the end, which will also fulfill

the global proclamation of the gospel: “But the person who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole inhabited earth as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt 24:13–14). In summary, Jesus’s response to his disciples is a panoramic “shotgun” description of many events that will happen right up to the end of the age (vv. 4–14). In verse 15, Jesus shifts to highlight the awful time of persecution for believers that was described in verses 9–14. In verse 15, the inferential Greek conjunction *oun* (“therefore” or “so”) indicates the beginning of this parenthetical section that will explain *how* this persecution will be brought about, the abomination of desolation: “So [*oun*] when you see the abomination of desolation—spoken about by Daniel the prophet—standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)” (Matt 24:15). By drawing from Daniel the prophet, Jesus is referring to Daniel’s end-time antagonist (aka the Antichrist) who will come on the world’s scene to demand allegiance from the world and punish those who do not follow him (cf. Rev 13). In addition, from Daniel, we also know that the abomination of desolation will take place in the middle of a seven-year period: “He will confirm a covenant with many for one week. But in the middle of that week, he will bring sacrifices and offerings to a halt. On the wing of abominations will come one who destroys, until the decreed end is poured out on the one who destroys” (Dan 9:27; cf. Dan 11:45; 2 Thess 2:1–4). While the Antichrist’s actions will have reverberations around the world, the epicenter will be in Jerusalem with the abomination of desolation. This is why Jesus gives specific directives for believers who are living in the vicinity of Jerusalem at this time: “Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains. The one on the roof must not come down to take anything out of his house, and the one in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing their babies in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath” (Matt 24:16–20).

The abomination of desolation that will occur at the midpoint precipitates the notorious great tribulation: “For *then* there will be great suffering [*thlipsis megalē*] unlike anything that has happened from the beginning

of the world until now, or ever will happen” (Matt 24:21 emphasis added; cf. Dan 12:1–2). We are next told the purpose for the cutting short is to rescue the elect from the great tribulation: “And if those days had not been cut short, no one [the elect] would be saved [delivered]. But *for the sake of* the elect those days will be cut short” (Matt 24:22). In other words, if the great tribulation continued to its intended effect, then all the elect would be exterminated. But God will cut it short “for the sake of the elect.”

The question remains, *how* will those days be cut short? Jesus explains that it will be cut short with his return (i.e. his Parousia) to rescue the elect out from the great tribulation. Before Jesus describes this, he warns believers that the great tribulation will be characterized by acute deception contrasted with the genuine sign presaging his coming:

Then if anyone says to you, “Look, here is the Christ!” or “There he is!” do not believe him. For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. Remember, I have told you ahead of time. So then, if someone says to you, “Look, he is in the wilderness,” do not go out, or “Look, he is in the inner rooms,” do not believe him. For just like the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so the coming [*parousia*] of the Son of Man will be. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather (Matt 24:23–28; cf. Luke 21:34–36).

The bright sign of the coming [*parousia*] of Christ therefore will signal to the elect that their Savior is returning to rescue them for glory. The brightness will pierce through the cosmic darkness of the celestial disturbances when Christ cuts those days short for the rescue: “*Immediately after* the suffering of those days [i.e. the great tribulation], the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man arriving on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt 24:29–30 emphasis added; cf. Joel 2:30–31!). The narrative continues to describe the specific mode of his angels cutting short



the great tribulation by gathering the elect: “And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matt 24:31; cf. 1 Cor 15:42; 1 Thess 4:13–18).⁶

While Jesus tells his disciples that they should discern the season when the great tribulation is cut short with his coming (Matt 24:32–35), they will not know the exact day or hour the coming will cut it short: “But as for that day and hour no one knows it—not even the angels in heaven—except the Father alone” (Matt 24:36). Jesus employs a host of parables and similitudes to illustrate Matt 24:31 regarding the separation that will occur when the elect are taken to meet Jesus and the unrighteous are left behind for judgment (Matt 24:37—25:30; cf. Luke 17:22–37!).

Here is what we know up to this point from our contextual examination.

1. The abomination of desolation begins at the midpoint of the seven-year period.
2. The abomination of desolation starts the great tribulation targeting believers.
3. The great tribulation is cut short for the purpose of rescuing believers out from within it.
4. Jesus’s coming in Matt 24:31 describes the righteous being taken to Jesus and the unrighteous being left behind for judgment.

⁶ For an extensive treatment that explains why Matt 24:31 describes the resurrection and the rapture, see Alan Kurschner, *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord: What Every Christian Should Know about the Return of Christ* (Pompton Lakes, NJ: Eschatos Publishing, 2013), 86–101.

5. We will know the season of Jesus’s return, but not the day or hour when it cuts short the great tribulation.

The Greek Term Koloboō (“Cut Short”) in Matthew 24:22

The Greek verb *koloboō* is used twice in Matt 24:22 for “cut short.” The only other instance of this term in the Bible is found in the parallel passage of the Olivet Discourse where it is used twice in Mark 13:20. The Greek lexicon by Louw and Nida lists the glosses *to shorten, to decrease, and to reduce in number* and defines the term as “to cause something to be reduced in number or extent.”⁷ Louw and Nida comments on our instance in Matt 24:22, stating, “There may be difficulties involved in a strictly literal rendering of ‘those days will be shortened,’ for it might appear that each day would become shorter rather than that the number of days would be decreased. Therefore, one must render this expression in Mt 24:22 in a number of languages as ‘those days will be fewer.’” The lexicon *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG) mentions the glosses *cut off, cut short, mutilate, and curtail* and defines the term as “to cause something not to be full length, to shorten” and “to reduce the duration of something, shorten.”⁸

What these two noted lexicons suggest is that the semantic range can include either the sense of something that had full length and was shortened or the sense of something that intended to become longer that was shortened before it reaches its full length. Before we examine which sense our instance of *koloboō* in Matt 24:22 captures, we need to broaden our scope to examine how this term is used in other instances from Greek literature outside of the New Testament during the Koine period.

The term is found only once in the Greek version of the Old Testament: “And Daudid [David] commanded

⁷ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989).

⁸ Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

his lads, and they killed them and *docked* their hands and their feet and hung them at the well at Chebron, and the head of Memphibosthe they buried in the tomb of Abenner son of Ner” (2 Sam 4:12 NETS). *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* notes that the word means “to mutilate, to cut off.”⁹ In this instance, it clearly represents the sense of something that had full length and was shortened. The term is also used once in the Greek Pseudepigrapha: “And at the transgression of the first Adam, it was near to Sammael when he took the serpent as a garment. And it did not hide itself but increased, and God was angry with it, and afflicted it, and *shortened* its days” (3 Baruch 9:7). Here it carries the other sense of something intending to become longer but is shortened. This instance is similar in meaning to Matt 24:22 in that it represents *days being shortened*.¹⁰

While these examples help to establish the range of sense and nuances, it will be the immediate context of Matt 24:22 that clarifies what Jesus means by those days of great tribulation being shortened. Matthew 24:15–21 teaches that the great tribulation that began with the abomination of desolation will be directed toward *believers*. To begin with, this is explicitly confirmed with the statement, “But for the sake of the *elect* those days will be cut short” (Matt 24:22). The context indicates that it will be God who will cut those days short, because it is God who sends his Son at that time to rescue the elect and gather them. It follows that the great tribulation is motivated by Satan. Paul confirms this when he describes what Antichrist will do at the midpoint with the abomination of desolation: “He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, and as a result he takes his seat in God’s temple, displaying himself as God. . . . The arrival of the lawless one will be by Satan’s working [*energeia*]

with all kinds of miracles and signs and false wonders” (2 Thess 2:4, 9). Note here that Paul uses the term *energeia* (“working”), which suggests that the “man of lawlessness” is satanically possessed. Satan has always desired and attempted to destroy God’s saints (both Gentile and Jewish) in the past and present, and he will in the future (cf. Rev 12:12–17). This supports the understanding in Matt 24:22 that it is Satan’s motive to have the great tribulation last until his intended full effect: the extermination of all believers. In fact, this is exactly what the text tells us: “And if those days had not been cut short, *no one would be saved*. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short” (Matt 24:22 emphasis added). The Greek term underlying “saved” (*sōzō*) can represent spiritual salvation or physical salvation (i.e. rescue). Some may point out that the text says “no one,” which would include the entire world and not just believers. This is not correct, because the context is addressing the fate of believers, not unbelievers. It is speaking of *all* believers at that time. The unbelieving world at large will love the Antichrist—he will be considered a savior to them. He will not be putting them to death, rather, it will be believers who will stand firm in their allegiance to Christ and thus against Antichrist. This is why Jesus follows up with the warning to *Christians*: “Remember, I have told *you* ahead of time” (Matt 24:25; cf. Matt 24:9: “*You* will be hated by all the nations *because of my name*”). To be sure, the other object of persecution for the Antichrist will be Israel, especially a remnant of Jews who will not capitulate to his program. A remnant of Jews will be protected, but the nation of Israel will undergo its worst tribulation ever (Dan 12:1–2; Jer 30:7).

In summary, we learn that the use of *kolobōō* in the immediate context of Matt 24:22 means that the cutting short represents the rescue of believers during the day of great tribulation. Jesus teaches that the great tribulation begins at the midpoint with the abomination of desolation (Matt 24:15; cf. Dan 9:27) and it will continue until it is cut short at the unknown day and hour that the Father has determined when he sends his Son to gather his elect (Matt 24:22, 29, 36).

⁹ Johan Lust, Erik Eynikel, and Katrin Hauspie, *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 3rd Corrected Edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2015).

¹⁰ A few more examples in Koine Greek include a single instance in Epictetus where the term refers to one who loses his nose (*Discourses*, Book 2, 10:20) and three instances in the *Shepherd of Hermas* that carry the sense of imperfection by not reaching a desired standard (10:8; 14:4; 85:5).

Other Biblical Evidence for Cutting Short

The gracious act of God cutting short the great tribulation for Christians with the return of Christ is not peculiar to Jesus's Olivet Discourse. We will examine further instances in the Gospel of Luke, Paul's Thessalonian letters, and finally in the book of Revelation.

Jesus's Parable of the Persistent Widow

Luke 18:1–8 is a neglected prophecy passage, and yet it communicates that believers will be experiencing great suffering before God cuts it short with the return of the Son of Man:

Then Jesus told them a parable to show them they should always pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected people. There was also a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but later on he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor have regard for people, yet because this widow keeps on bothering me, I will give her justice, or in the end she will wear me out by her unending pleas.'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unrighteous judge says! Won't God give justice to his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he delay long to help them? I tell you, he will give them justice speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:1–8).

It is unfortunate there is a chapter break at Luke 18, because it belongs to the previous chapter concerning the return of Christ, resulting in the righteous being delivered on the same day as the eschatological wrath of God begins (see Luke 17:20–37). Jesus illustrates this with an additional parable of an unrelenting widow in Luke 18:1–8. There are at least four points we can draw from in this parable. First, right up to the point of Christ's return, God's people will be suffering and experiencing injustice. Second, during that time believers should "not lose heart" and instead pray with "unending pleas" that God shortens their tribulation: "Will he delay long to help them?" Third, the great tribulation will be so severe that Jesus's question suggests many will fall away from the faith because

of persecution: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Fourth, the justice of God's judgment will begin *at that time*, i.e. when the Son of Man comes, not before.

While this parable does not explicitly state the activity of "cutting short," it reveals the groaning that believers will be experiencing and the "unending pleas" to see their tribulation cut short by God's "justice" (i.e. the day of the Lord's wrath). This is consistent with Matthew's version of Jesus's Parousia in his Olivet Discourse as it complements our focus with these additional aspects to the event of the great tribulation being cut short.

Paul's Teaching in 1 and 2 Thessalonians

Turning to Paul, there are two key instances in his Thessalonian letters that instruct us on God cutting short the tribulation that the church will experience. A few months after the apostle Paul left his church plant in Thessalonica, he received a message that the church was being troubled by defective eschatology about Jesus's coming (i.e. his Parousia). Some in the Thessalonian church had died and, we can surmise from the context, they thought that their loved ones would not participate in Christ's Parousia. To correct their mistaken eschatology, Paul draws from Jesus's Olivet Discourse to inform the newly-formed church about the Parousia event (1 Thess 4:13—5:11).¹¹ As explained above, Jesus taught the great tribulation against believers would be cut short with his Parousia. Paul makes this same point in his instruction to the Thessalonian church: "For we tell you this by the word of the Lord [i.e. the Olivet Discourse tradition], that we who are alive, who are left [*perileipomenoi*] until the coming [*parousia*] of the Lord, will surely not go ahead of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Thess 4:15). Paul does not merely note the existence of believers who will be alive up to the Parousia, he describes the nature of being alive by choosing to use the Greek term *perileipomenoi*, which means *to remain, be left behind*.¹² This term, used here and in verse 17, occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. In Greek literature outside

¹¹ There are thirty parallels between Jesus's and Paul's end-time teachings; see Kurschner, *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord*, 178–81.

¹² BDAG

of the New Testament, when the term is applied to humans it commonly represents *survival where others have already died or suffered*.¹³ Paul explains that this tribulation for believers who will survive will last “until” (*eis*) the Parousia *shortens* it with the rapture and resurrection. Similarly, Paul teaches it is a mystery that the last and surviving generation of the church will not experience death before they receive their new, resurrected bodies (see 1 Cor 15:51–52).

In his second epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul reiterates this point to correct another misunderstanding. In Paul’s first epistle to the Thessalonians, he reassures them that their recently-deceased loved ones will not miss the Parousia. In his second epistle, he reassures them that they themselves will not miss the Parousia, since they had confused the persecution they were enduring with God’s wrath. In 2 Thess 2:3 he explains that two events must happen before (*protos*) the day of the Lord: the apostasy and the revelation of the man of lawlessness. Since the Thessalonians had not yet witnessed these two events, they could be assured that they were not experiencing the day of the Lord’s wrath.

But it is the first chapter of his second epistle that concerns us now, since Paul teaches that the return of Jesus will cut short their “persecutions and afflictions” and give them relief (2 Thess 1:4–5). He says this will happen when Jesus returns: “For it is right for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to you who are being afflicted *to give rest* together with us *when* the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels. With flaming fire he will mete out punishment on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thess 1:6–8 emphasis added). While Jesus did not return during the first readers’ lifetime, Paul intended his instruction to comfort both them and especially the last generation of the church. These are the ones who will be given rest when Jesus cut shorts their afflictions, afflictions that Paul will associate with end-time persecutors such as the “man of lawlessness” (2 Thess 2:3). Not only will the ungodly suffer the temporal day of the Lord’s wrath, but it will be followed by

God’s eternal wrath: “They will undergo the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his strength” (2 Thess 1:9). The relief of the church will occur “when the Lord Jesus is revealed” (2 Thess 1:7) and *on the same day* his wrath will begin to be poured out: “When he comes to be glorified among his saints and admired *on that day* among all who have believed—and you did in fact believe our testimony” (2 Thess 1:10 emphasis added).

Before moving to our last instance found in the book of Revelation, we can summarize a key point from both Jesus’s and Paul’s instructions: God’s eschatological wrath will occur *after* the church undergoes eschatological persecution, i.e. the great tribulation. It is a mistake to confuse Antichrist’s great tribulation with God’s wrath. When the great tribulation is cut short, God will vindicate his people through the day of the Lord’s wrath.

Revelation 7:14

A prominent feature of the book of Revelation is the scroll sealed with seven seals. The first four seals *prove* the guilty deserve God’s wrath, the fifth seal *promises* God’s wrath, the sixth seal *portends* God’s wrath, at which time two groups are *protected* from God’s wrath, and the seventh seal *pronounces* God’s wrath. When the sixth seal is broken, the sky is split open and God begins to confront “the kings of the earth, the very important people, the generals, the rich, the powerful, and everyone, slave and free” (Rev 6:15). J. Webb Mealy observes,

The fact that they attempt to hide themselves (6.15–17) recalls Gen. 3.7–10, and underlines the judicial character of the passage. . . . Now, in the sixth seal, the sense is that the prayer [of the martyred saints for God’s vindication] is being answered, and that all humanity is being “caught red-handed.” Thus people are represented as having a sense of guilt so great that they prefer death to standing face-to-face with a just God and his “Christ.”¹⁴

¹⁴ J. Webb Mealy. *After the Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20*. JSNT Sup 70 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 68.

¹³ E.g. 4 Macc 12:6; 4 Macc 13:18; Ant. 1:96; Ant. 5:228; Ant. 6:146; Ant. 6:364; Jub. 4:10; 3 *Hist. eccl.* 23:1; 3 *Hist. eccl.* 12:1.

We can clearly see this in action as they “hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, because the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to withstand it?’” (Rev 6:15–17; cf. Joel 2:30–31). Before the seventh seal is broken, unleashing the eschatological divine wrath, there is a conspicuous interruption in the narrative. John sees two remnant groups being protected before God’s wrath begins (Rev 7). First, he sees “144,000, sealed from all the tribes of the people of Israel” (Rev 7:4–8). Second, he sees “an enormous crowd that no one could count, made up of persons from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb dressed in long white robes, and with palm branches in their hands” (Rev 7:9). The break at this point in the narrative describing this protection comports with its immediate context. What comes before the opening of the seventh seal *prepares* for God’s wrath, and what comes after the opening of the seventh seal *pours* out God’s wrath.

This innumerable multitude is praising God for their salvation (Rev 7:10), which certainly includes praising God for their new, resurrected bodies. In verse 14, John learns that they have been taken out of the great tribulation:

Cut Short by Deliverance

Matthew 24:15–31	1 Thessalonians 4:15–17	2 Thessalonians 1:4–12	Revelation 7:9–17
Delivered from tribulation at the resurrection and the rapture	Delivered from tribulation at the resurrection and the rapture	Delivered from tribulation at the resurrection and the rapture	Delivered from tribulation at the resurrection and the rapture

“So I said to him, ‘My lord, you know the answer.’ Then he said to me, ‘These are the ones who *have come out of the great tribulation*. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb!’” (Rev 7:14 emphasis added). There is a question of whether this group only represents Christians alive on earth at the time, who receive their resurrection at the Parousia and are then taken out of the great tribulation, or if it includes the larger church and depicts the resurrection occurring at this time. For our purposes, what we know from this passage is that the great tribulation will be cut short by the return of Jesus for deliverance followed by God’s wrath through the trumpet and bowl judgments.

In summary of these passages, the action of cutting short the persecution of Christians before Jesus returns is not peculiar to Matt 24:22. It is found clearly in Jesus’s other eschatological teaching, Paul’s Thessalonian letters, and the book of Revelation.

Answering Other Interpretations

In this last section, I will respond to other interpretations concerning the great tribulation being cut short in Matt 24:22. I will begin with futurist understandings and then respond to a historicist and a preterist understanding.

‘Antichrist Is Given Absolute Authority to Persecute the Church for 3.5 Years’

The Antichrist can certainly exercise relative authority for the entire 3.5 years without any effect on whether the tribulation of the church is cut short or not. For me to establish that the Antichrist has relative authority—not absolute authority—does not in itself demonstrate that the great tribulation is cut short less than 3.5 years. The aim, however, of this first point is to establish the *conditions* by which the Antichrist’s great tribulation is cut short for the church. It will suggest that he will not have absolute authority for the entire 3.5 years. Some interpreters, especially posttribulationists, may think that since he is given authority for 3.5 years, this must be *absolute* authority, requiring the church to be on earth during the entire 3.5-year period. Daniel 7:25 and Rev 13:5–7 are usually cited for this notion, both of which will be addressed later.

The following reasons demonstrate that the Antichrist will not have absolute authority during this period but only *relative* authority. In the book of Revelation, God is shown to be active in *protecting* and *judging* during the second half, something he could not do if the Antichrist possessed absolute authority.

First, a faithful remnant of Israel, “the woman” (Rev 12:12–17), is protected by God from the beast and Satan during the 3.5-year period. This shows that while Antichrist has authority for 3.5 years, he does not have authority over everyone. God does not allow Antichrist’s activities to be expressed without strictures. It follows that if God will do this for a remnant of Israel, then there is no necessary principle that would prevent him from protecting the church at some point during the 3.5-year period.

Second, during the 3.5-year period the Antichrist will be restrained from harming the Two Witnesses (Rev 11:1–12).¹⁵ If Antichrist’s authority were absolute then he should be able to kill the Two Witnesses at once. But God has limited the scope of whom the Antichrist can harm. It bears repeating, since God will do this for his Two Witnesses for 3.5 years, it is not difficult to accept that he can easily cut short the Antichrist’s persecution against the church for a shorter period. Antichrist’s authority—and by extension, Satan’s authority—is relative, restrained in a similar manner as it was when God restrained Satan’s authority over Job by setting Satan’s authority within parameters.¹⁶

While God protects certain people during Antichrist’s period of authority, God also judges during part of Antichrist’s 3.5-year period of authority. When

¹⁵ For a cogent defense that the Two Witnesses die at the end of the second half of Daniel’s 70th week and not the midpoint, see Chris White’s “The Timing of the Two Witnesses,” *Bible Prophecy Talk*, Ep. 53, Oct 6, 2020; <https://youtu.be/Vz9t-4FCoDo>

¹⁶ I have argued elsewhere (Kurschner, *Antichrist before the Day of the Lord*, 49–53), that the fourth and fifth seal represent the Antichrist’s great tribulation, where his authority is limited to a “fourth of the earth”: e.g. “were given authority over a *fourth of the earth*, to kill its population with the sword, famine, and disease, and by the wild animals of the earth” (Rev 6:8). Exactly what the scope of the “fourth of the earth” refers to is debated, but the point is that he does not have absolute authority over the entire earth. To be sure, this does not mean that a fourth of the earth will be killed, rather, the language indicates that he will have authority *over a sphere* of the fourth of the earth.

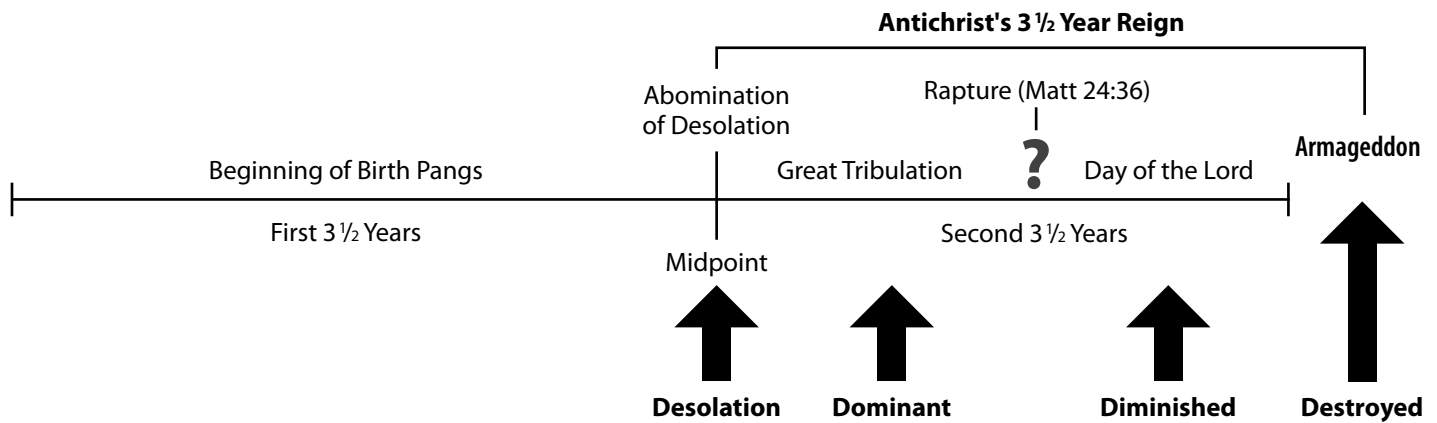
the great tribulation is cut short at some unknown point during the 3.5-year period, it will allow sufficient time for the trumpet judgments associated with the day of the Lord’s wrath to occur during the remaining period of the 70th week (e.g. the fifth trumpet is said to last five months according to Rev 9:5). When Jesus returns to judge, Antichrist continues to operate his beastly kingdom from a diminished standpoint during the trumpet and bowl judgments, even marshaling the armies of the world to attempt to defeat Christ in one last stand against him (see Rev 8–9; 15–16; 19). One further point, which should not be overlooked, is that the seventh trumpet of God’s wrath is blown a few days *after* the 3.5 years ministry of the Two Witnesses (Rev 11:1–15). This demonstrates clearly that God’s eschatological wrath of the previous six trumpet judgments will occur before the 70th week is complete—and accordingly, the great tribulation of the beast’s persecution against the church must be cut short before the completion of the 70th week.

For these reasons, the book of Revelation establishes that the beast’s great tribulation against the church does not possess absolute authority. The great tribulation will be cut short with Jesus’s Parousia, which will be followed by God’s wrath upon the wicked for the remaining part of the 3.5 years. (See chart on page 25.)

‘Daniel’s 70th Week Is the Shortened Period’

Having established that the Antichrist’s authority is relative, we turn to examine other interpretations of how the great tribulation will be cut short. Some interpreters construe the cutting short to mean that in eternity past God decreed the 70th week of Daniel *to be* the shortened period. The shortening of the great tribulation, it is argued, should be understood as equal to the 70th week of Daniel. For example, Renald Showers contends that before time God “purposed or determined what would happen during the course of history.”¹⁷ We would not disagree with that claim. But then he makes a strained leap attempting to link the meaning of the Greek verb *koloboō* in Matt 24:22 to the Old Testament Hebrew verb *hatak* in Dan 9:24

¹⁷ Renald Showers, *Maranatha—Our Lord. Comes!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc, 1995), 52–55.



rendered decree that “cuts” out seventy weeks of time (i.e. 490 years).¹⁸ Showers states ambiguously that both terms have this “basic meaning” (however, he never defines what he means by this). Linguistically, however, these two words have markedly different meanings. As mentioned earlier, *koloboō* carries the sense of *to shorten, to decrease*.¹⁹ But the Hebrew *hatak* in the Niphal verbal stem carries the sense of *divide, determine*.²⁰ The semantic differences render Showers’s understanding unwarranted and consequently stretches the semantics to make these terms mean something they do not.

In addition, the way Showers frames this seems to be that he is arguing against the view that God would change his mind in the future by cutting the decreed days of tribulation short. While some interpreters may believe this, it is not the view that prewrath affirms. Instead, prewrath affirms that God in his sovereignty has decreed from eternity past for Satan’s goal to exterminate all believers to be cut short—i.e. he will not accomplish his goal, which would have required

God to allow the great tribulation to continue. In Dan 9:24–27, God has also decreed that Israel’s unbelief will continue until the seventy weeks (490 years) are complete. These are two distinct events, which serve two different purposes, one for the church and one for Israel.

Next, we must consider the respective contexts that Showers fails to examine. First, we know that the great tribulation *begins* at the midpoint of the 70th week and that the 70th week of Daniel will be seven years in length. But there is no evidence in the immediate context that Jesus is identifying the duration of the great tribulation with the 3.5 years of the second half of the 70th week. It is an assumption to equate the two. Second, it renders the use of the term *koloboō* by Jesus incoherent and meaningless. If the great tribulation were intended to occur during the entire second half of the seven-year period, then why would Jesus use this special term to give hope and promise to believers? Knowing that his disciples were aware of Daniel’s prophecy, Jesus could have easily referenced that it would be completed at the end of the second half. Instead, Jesus’s use of the term *koloboō* signaling a key event that will take place *within* the second half, an event that will be cut short early, before its intended goal is met. Third, the purpose for God determining the duration of the block of 490 years of Daniel’s seventy weeks was to mark out a termination point for Israel’s unbelief (Dan 9:20–27), while the explicitly stated purpose for God to shorten the days of great tribulation is to rescue Christians from

¹⁸ Showers, *Maranatha*, 53.

¹⁹ Louw and Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.

²⁰ F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament: Based on A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (abridged) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907). The Septuagint (aka LXX), the Greek Old Testament, has several versions of the Hebrew Old Testament. One version for Dan 9:24 is *krinō* (Old Greek), which means *to determine, decree*; and another version has *syntemnō* (Theodotion), which means *to run short (of time)* in the context of *units of time* (J. Lust, E. Eynikel, and K. Hauspie, G. Chamberlain, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 2nd [Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart: 2003]).



extermination (Matt 24:22). Fourth, Jesus says that the great tribulation will be cut short by his coming at an hour and day that no one knows (Matt 24:36). We know the great tribulation begins at the midpoint and, if it occurs for 3.5 years, *then believers will know the day when Jesus's coming will cut short the great tribulation*—which contradicts Jesus's teaching. The truth in Matt 24:36 that no one knows the day or hour demonstrates that the great tribulation will be cut short sometime during the second half of the seven-year period, not at its completion. The force of this last point seems to escape many pretribulationists and posttribulationists.

I will conclude with a final point from Robert H. Gundry that there is no support for the claim that the second half is equal in length to the great tribulation period:

The fact that Jesus made His statement long after the revelation of the chronology of seventy weeks renders untenable the view that the seven years of the 70th week are already the shortened period. Jesus hardly implies that God originally planned the 70th week to run longer than seven years, or that He intended a period longer than the seventy weeks [and then shortened it to the full 70th week]. The very symbolism of the number seven militates against the suggestion. To say that the cutting short refers to the already determined end of an already determined length of time renders Jesus' statement vapid.²¹

'Daniel's 70th Week Is Shortened to Less than Seven Years'

This next interpretation shortens the 70th week itself. Gundry above rightly critiqued the belief that the 70th week is the shortened period, but his own solution of Matt 24:22 is even less tenable. Gundry proposes that the 70th week *itself becomes shortened*. He writes, "For the sake of the persecuted saints God will not allow the 70th week to run its full course."²² He also views his interpretation as a way to avoid

²¹ Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation: A Biblical Examination of Posttribulationism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 42.

²² Gundry, *Church and the Tribulation*, 42; cf. Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 484.

calculating the day and hour of Jesus's return, as he admits could be done if the great tribulation were to extend to the very end of the 70th week.²³ However, his understanding of cutting short the 70th week itself encounters several problems. First, the reasons stated in the previous points undermine Gundry's view that the 70th week is shortened to less than seven years. Most importantly, the usage of *koloboō* in reference to the great tribulation of believers is distinct from the purpose of the decree of the seventy weeks in reference to the length of Israel's unbelief decreed by God. Second, and this point should not be missed: the book of Revelation, which was written about sixty years after Jesus gave his Olivet Discourse, repeatedly uses designations for the *last half* of Daniel's 70th week being exactly 3.5 years (Rev 11:2, 3; 12:6; 13:5). If Jesus shortened the 70th week of Daniel itself in his Olivet Discourse (Matt 24:22), then he contradicted his own teaching in the book of Revelation where he makes it clear that the great tribulation will continue for 3.5 years, at which time the final seven years will be completed.

'The Great Tribulation in Matthew 24 Refers to Unbelieving Jews'

This next interpretation proposes that the great tribulation in Matt 24 refers not to the church but to unbelieving Jews or the nation of Israel as a whole. Earlier we touched on whether the elect are believers but we need to say more on point. It has been argued by some that since the nation of Israel will be on earth for the entire second half of the 70th week of Daniel, it is believed that the great tribulation will continue for 3.5 years. This understanding then construes the cutting short of the great tribulation to refer to the entire second half and not to a shorter period. For example, Renald Showers writes, "Any biblical indication of the length of [the persecution of the Jews] and hiding will also indicate the length of the Great Tribulation."²⁴ We have critiqued his view above that equates the great tribulation with the entire 3.5-year period. Here, I want to focus on Showers's interpretation where he assumes that the elect who

are the targets of the Antichrist's persecution in Matt 24 are presumably unbelieving Jews and therefore the great tribulation must be 3.5 years in length.

After Showers makes this claim, he quickly moves outside the immediate context of Matt 24 to passages that speak of the 3.5 year period that pertains to Israel. For example, he cites Rev 12:6 and 12:14 with their references to Israel and the second half of Daniel's 70th week. He also attempts to make a connection between the elect in Matt 24 who are told to flee Jerusalem and the woman in Rev 12 who flees.²⁵ There are two problems with identifying the elect in Matt 24 with the woman. First, in Matt 24:4–22, there are clear references that describe the elect as *believers in Christ* (more on this below). So, this cannot represent the woman in Rev 12 who is not described as believing in Christ (this remnant of Israel will only come to faith *after* the 70th week of Daniel is complete, the very purpose of the prophecy). Second, in Matt 24:15–16, believers are commanded to flee to the *mountains* (*oros*), while in Rev 12:6 and 14 the woman flees to the *desert* (*erēmos*). Moreover, in this immediate context, these two groups who are targets of Satan's wrath are distinguished as being *on earth at the same time*: "Then the dragon was angry with the woman [Israel], and went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus [the church]" (Rev 12:17).

Showers also cites Rev 13:5–7 where the beast was "allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months."²⁶ The text says that "the beast was permitted to go to war against the saints and conquer them" (Rev 13:7). Showers, however, reads into this passage and assumes that the beast's persecution against believing saints will last 42 months. This is not what it says. The persecution, to be sure, is included within part of this period, but John never states that the persecution itself against believing saints will last 42 months. Rather, the 42 months of authority is over the unbelieving world at large: "He was given ruling authority [*exousia*] over every tribe, people, language, and nation, and all those who live on the earth will worship the beast, everyone whose name has not been written since the foundation

²³ Gundry, *Church and the Tribulation*, 42–43.

²⁴ Showers, *Maranatha*, 44.

²⁵ Showers, *Maranatha*, 44–45.

²⁶ Showers, *Maranatha*, 45.

of the world in the book of life belonging to the Lamb who was killed” (Rev 13:7–8 emphasis added). The Antichrist will persecute Christians starting at the midpoint, but the question of how long that specific persecution will last is not mentioned.

Next, Showers cites Dan 7:25: “He will speak words against the Most High. He will harass the holy ones of the Most High continually. His intention will be to change times established by law. The holy ones will be delivered into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.”²⁷ As is the case with Rev 12 and the woman, I agree with Showers that the saints here represent the set-apart nation of Israel. Showers is wrong, however, to identify Israel with the believing elect depicted in Matt 24. In the Old Testament, Israel was called God’s “holy” people not because they were perfect or in a state of righteousness, but because they were *set apart, consecrated in service for God’s purposes* (e.g. Exod 19:6; Lev 19:2; Deut 7:6). This is why in Daniel they are called “holy ones” or “saints” who, as the nation of Israel, will be the object of the beast’s persecution.²⁸ Daniel is referring to the period that is often referred to as Jacob’s [i.e. Israel’s] trouble: “Alas, what a terrible time of trouble it is! There has never been any like it. It is a time of trouble for the descendants of Jacob, but some of them will be rescued out of it” (Jer 30:7).

Next, Showers cites Dan 12:7 to demonstrate that Israel’s unequalled tribulation will last 3.5 years: “Then I heard the man clothed in linen who was over the waters of the river as he raised both his right and left hands to the sky and made an oath by the one who lives forever: ‘It is for a time, times, and half a time [3.5 years]. Then, when the power of the one who shatters the holy people has been exhausted, all these things will be finished.’”²⁹ This period of tribulation is referring back to Dan 12:1: “there will be a time of distress unlike any other from the nation’s beginning up to that time.” Prewrath agrees with this point. However, Showers then makes a strained move by attempting to equate this 3.5-year period with the

period of great tribulation Jesus refers to that he says believers will experience. Indeed, Jesus uses a similar statement in Matt 24:21: “For then there will be great suffering unlike anything that has happened from the beginning of the world until now, or ever will happen.” And it is true that Antichrist will cause the great suffering mentioned in both passages, but Showers fails to recognize that the Antichrist’s persecution is against *two* groups of people. Daniel 12:1 is in the context of *unbelieving Israel*, “your people,” while Matt 24:21 is in the context of the elect who are Christians: “Then they will hand you over to be persecuted and will kill you. You will be hated by all the nations *because of my name*” (Matt 24:9 emphasis added). It will be the worst period of tribulation for both groups. It is flawed therefore for Showers to equate the target of Antichrist’s persecution in Dan 12:7 (national Israel) with his target in Matt 24:21–28 (the church). While both will experience unprecedented tribulation, for the church those days will be cut short before the end of the 3.5-year period.

‘The Hours in Each Day Are Cut Short’

Next is an uncommon view that only requires a brief critique. It may be believed that the hours in *each* day within the great tribulation are cut short. This does not make sense, because the purpose for the shortening indicates an *absolute* cessation of martyrdom for the elect: “And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short” (Matt 24:22). This would not work if each day is cut short rather than a single period of persecution. Moreover, the immediate context clearly indicates that the days are viewed collectively as a period: “Immediately after the suffering of *those* days” (Matt 24:29 emphasis added). Jesus explains that the period will be cut short with the coming of the Son of Man (Matt 24:29–31). The notion then of the earth’s orbit increasing in speed to cause shorter days does not make sense considering the purpose for the shortening is to end the persecution. It may be argued that the individual days being cut short will effectively shorten the length of tribulation in general since there will be less time in each day for believers to be killed. The obvious problem with this is that the text describes that it is Jesus’s Parousia that will cut short the great

²⁷ Showers, *Maranatha*, 45.

²⁸ For further description on this point, see Travis M. Snow, “Israel, the Church, and the Last Half of Daniel’s 70th Week,” *Biblical Prophecy Magazine* 1.2 (Fall 2021).

²⁹ Showers, *Maranatha*, 45–46.



tribulation, as the persecuted elect are rescued by angels and gathered to Christ. In other words, the message is not that Jesus is going to return at the end of each day! He is going to cut the great tribulation short *once*. For these reasons, this interpretation lacks viable support.

‘The Second Coming Cuts Short the Church Age Tribulation’

Up to this point, I have responded to objections and misunderstandings from those who are futurists, that is, those who affirm a future 70th week of Daniel. Historicists are those who believe that Jesus’s Olivet Discourse and the book of Revelation depict events occurring during the interadvent period (i.e. during the church age) and therefore believe that Daniel’s 70th week has already been fulfilled in the first century or it is only symbolic of the entire church age. To be sure, historicists affirm a future resurrection and return of Christ, but they would minimize or reject a future 70th week and its accompanied eschatological events (e.g. birth pangs, future Antichrist, great tribulation). Historicism believes that the abomination of desolation mentioned by Jesus in his Olivet Discourse refers, not to the future events caused by an Antichrist figure, but to the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem by the Roman general Titus and his army in the first century. In their framework, then, they locate the beginning of the

great tribulation near the year AD 70 associated with the tumult caused by Titus and his army. They view the great tribulation as realized during the entire church age with the suffering of believers and their proclamation of the gospel and faithful walk in Christ.³⁰

There are several problems with the historicist view of the great tribulation. First—and this reason also applies to the preterist view addressed below—Jesus explicitly states that he is drawing from the prophet Daniel on the abomination of desolation event and the great tribulation: “So when you see the abomination of desolation—spoken about by Daniel the prophet—standing in the holy place’ (let the reader understand)” (Matt 24:15). When we examine Daniel’s teaching on the abomination of desolation, we learn that it will occur in conjunction with the *consummation*. Daniel teaches that the abomination of desolation will occur at the midpoint: “He will confirm a covenant with many for one week. But in the middle of that week, he will bring sacrifices and offerings to a halt. On the wing of abominations will come one who destroys, until the decreed end is poured out on the one who destroys” (Dan 9:27). Three and one-half years after this profaned event, the prophecy says that Israel’s unbelief and rebellion will be finished: “Seventy weeks have been determined concerning your people and your holy city to put an end to rebellion, to bring sin to completion, to atone for iniquity, to bring in perpetual righteousness, to seal up the prophetic vision, and to anoint a Most Holy Place” (Dan 9:24). The salvation of Israel did not happen in AD 70, as, especially, preterism would understand it. Instead, the opposite occurred. She was judged in AD 70 *for her unbelief*. Daniel’s 70 weeks point to the future at Messiah’s return when Israel will recognize him as their Savior, a time accompanied by repentance and belief.³¹

Second, in his Olivet Discourse, Jesus links the unequalled period of suffering in Matt 24:21 with Dan 12:1, which in turn is linked directly to the future resurrection: “At that time Michael, the great prince

³⁰ E.g. Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. The New American Commentary 22 (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992), 359–60.

³¹ Daniel also links the seventy weeks prophecy to the consummation in Dan 12:4–13.



who watches over your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress unlike any other from the nation's beginning up to that time. But at that time your own people, all those whose names are found written in the book, will escape. Many of those who sleep in the dusty ground will awake—some to everlasting life, and others to shame and everlasting abhorrence” (Dan 12:1–2).

Third, Matt 24:21 states that the great tribulation will be “unlike anything that has happened from the beginning of the world until now, or ever will happen” (Matt 24:21). This is incoherent language to describe the two-thousand year church age. The language points to a specific, discernable event and not some “general” persecution going on for 2,000 years.

Fourth, Matt 24:29 states that the second coming will occur “immediately after the suffering of those days,” which refers to its tribulation antecedent in verses 15–22. The historicist interpretation results in an absurdity by having the great tribulation that was caused by Titus in AD 70 continuing on for two thousand years—up to today! How the suffering of Christians today can have anything to do with Titus two thousand years ago defies plausibility. We know that the beginning of the great tribulation is caused by the abomination of desolation:

“For then there will be great suffering” (Matt 24:21; cf. v. 15). And Jesus explicitly links this tribulation to its termination: “Immediately after the suffering of *those days*” (Matt 24:29 emphasis added). In addition, the phrase “immediately after” (*eutheōs de meta*) in verse 29 signals a comparable short, intense event, not something that has been going on for 2,000 years.

The historicist interpretation does not comport with the natural reading of the narrative. Jesus relates the abomination of desolation event with his second coming in that he indicates the same generation will witness both events. The only unforced interpretations are either to affirm full preterism and believe the three events—the abomination of desolation, great tribulation, and the second coming—have already been fulfilled in AD 70, or to affirm futurism, understanding the three events to be fulfilled in the future.

‘The Roman Capture of Jerusalem Is the Cutting Short’

Finally, I want to respond to the preterist view that assumes both the great tribulation *and* its cutting short have already taken place in the first century. For example, R. T. France writes, “The horror was in fact ‘cut short’ by the Roman capture of the city after five months, bringing physical relief to those who had survived the famine in the city. But even this ‘natural’ process of conquest is attributed to the purpose of God . . . to enable his ‘chosen people’ to survive.”³² There are several reasons why the preterist view does not work. First, Matt 24:9 states, “Then they will hand you over to be persecuted and will kill you. You will be hated by all the nations because of my name” (cf. Matt 24:5, 24). This verse explicitly states a key reason (“*because of my name*”) for the great tribulation, which is hatred toward Christ. That was not a reason the Romans attacked Jerusalem.

Second, Luke’s account of Jesus’s Olivet Discourse describes elements that were not realized during the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. For example, Luke states, “Nations will be in distress, anxious over the roaring of the sea and the surging waves” (Luke 21:25). There is no historical record of nations

³² R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 915.

fretting over these apocalyptic events. Further, since preterists claim this prophecy is about the destruction of Jerusalem, it makes this statement about the distress of nations and seas nonsensical. Luke records another prophecy from Jesus: “But when these things begin to happen, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28). Unless I am mistaken, I am not aware of any historical records that demonstrate that Christians in Jerusalem were excited about being redeemed through the “impending Roman capture of Jerusalem.” Rather, Luke’s account depicts the world’s reaction to the *universal* portents of the coming of the Lord, which can only describe a future event.

Third, and most importantly, the text reveals that the cutting short was not the “Roman capture of the city.” Instead, Matt 24:31 reads, “And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” The text states that it will be God’s *direct supernatural intervention* through his angels to gather his elect—not, as preterists claim, Titus and his Roman army “bringing physical relief” to God’s elect. It may be objected that the rendering “angels” in Matt 24:31 is referring to human messengers since the Greek term *aggelos* can refer to a human messenger. The problem with this is that the immediate context is in the semantic domain of the heaven and the clouds: “The Son of Man arriving *on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*” (Matt 24:30 emphasis added). There is no linguistic signal that the scene has changed. In the very next statement, the context is the *sky*: “And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matt 24:31; cf. Luke 9:26: “For whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”). Heavenly angels are much more in keeping with the context than human messengers. Moreover, the apostle Paul develops his Parousia teaching by drawing from Jesus’s Parousia teaching. Paul explicitly signals the domain of *heavenly* activity: “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with

the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thess 4:16). Paul reinforces this point by describing that the heavenly angels will accompany Jesus at his return, which will cut short the tribulation: “For it is right for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to you who are being afflicted to give rest together with us when the Lord Jesus is *revealed from heaven with his mighty angels*. With flaming fire he will mete out punishment on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thess 1:6–8 emphasis added). In conclusion, preterist interpreters use strained exegesis that fails to explain the event of the great tribulation being cut short.³³

Conclusion

In this article, I explained the meaning of “cut short” in the context of Matt 24:22. Second, I expanded this examination by considering other relevant passages in Scripture that indicate the great tribulation will be cut short. And third, I responded to other interpretations that challenged the prewrath view of the great tribulation being cut short. In summary, the cutting short of the great tribulation is a foundational tenet of prewrath theology. Prewrath distinguishes between the period of Antichrist’s great tribulation and the eschatological wrath of God, also known as the day of the Lord’s wrath. The object of Antichrist’s wrath will be the church as well as Israel, where the latter will recognize their true Messiah at the end of the 70th week of Daniel. The object of the Lord’s wrath will be unbelievers. The great tribulation will be cut short sometime during the second half of the 70th week of Daniel when Jesus returns on the clouds at an unknown day and hour. **BP**



Alan E. Kurschner, Ph.D., is a biblical scholar committed to proclaiming the good news of God’s salvation in this dark world and heralding the second coming of his Son, Jesus Christ. Dr. Kurschner is the founder of Eschatos Ministries, teaching Bible prophecy from a futurist, premillennial, prewrath perspective. He is the author of *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord: What Every Christian Needs to Know about the Return of Christ*. He is also the host of the popular podcast *The Biblical Prophecy Program*™.

³³ For a more detailed response to preterism in general, see Brock David Hollett, *Debunking Preterism: How Over-Realized Eschatology Misses the “Not Yet” of Bible Prophecy* (Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 2018).

Letters of Encouragement



From Wisconsin:

The great rescue stories throughout scripture have always inspired me. To think that the most climactic rescue story of them all could happen in my own lifetime is more inspiring yet! I grew up in evangelical circles so the pretribulational rapture was the eschatological position I heard the most. I never questioned it until 2003 when I was introduced to *The Prewrath Position Explained: Plain and Simple*. I quickly realized eschatology wasn't as black and white as I had imagined. In fact, it was more than I could digest at the time so I focused my energy on topics I could wrap my head around like apologetics, predestination, and the creation account.

In 2014 my desire to look into eschatology was reawakened when a member of my Bible study taught prophecy from a strong pretribulational lens. I still had so many questions that needed answering. Later that year, I was serving as a wrestling coach on a mission trip to Mongolia. We were using our sports platform to gain access to some of the most remote parts of the world. It was awesome! As we were driving over the Mongolian prairies, the rapture topic came up.

Dan, who had introduced my family to the Prewrath position, was in that van with us. He referenced several verses from memory and had our team read them aloud. He challenged us to think about what the passages were actually saying rather than what we had always heard or simply wanted to be true.

In 2020, when our entire world was paralyzed by Covid in a matter of days, my study of end-times scripture was fueled. I couldn't stop reading Matthew, Thessalonians, Daniel, Revelation, and the Old Testament Prophets. I eventually reached out to several friends who were interested in eschatology, including Dan. He encouraged me to study what Thessalonians said about the man of lawlessness. The more I studied, the more I was convinced that several signs have to happen before the rapture occurs. As I began to pair the Olivet Discourse with the Revelation seals, the Prewrath position began making sense in a very refreshing way.

When Dan invited me to a Prewrath conference by his friend, Alan Kurschner, I couldn't pass up the opportunity. To say I was inspired by the conference is

a major understatement! With my newfound Prewrath framework, all the missing pieces and answers I had been searching for finally began falling into place. Any free moment I had was spent reading my Bible and comparing scripture with scripture.

I'm so thankful to the Lord for bringing people like Dan and Alan into my life and I pray He continues using Eschatos Ministries to spread the Good News far and wide! Nobody knows the day or hour of Jesus's return, but when the man of lawlessness is revealed, the sun and moon grow dark, and stars fall from the sky, I'll know it's time to go home!

— Justin Peterson

From North Carolina:

I grew up in Canada in the 80s and early 90s in Christian circles where the Lord's coming was continually top of mind. Pastors and guest speakers would mention how soon the Lord's Coming would be and how we need to be ready at any moment. During that same time, I heard many teachings on end times, which had a big impact on my life.

Even as a young teen I was fascinated by eschatology. I believed in a pretrib, premillennial view of when the rapture would occur; however, I wasn't 100% confident in the pretrib view. At the time, I knew of 3 main views: pretrib, midtrib, and posttrib, of which pretrib was the "most" right, I believed. I could see some holes in the pretrib view which I couldn't explain, but to me it was just the best of the views I knew. I also appreciated the scholarly perspectives of many of the posttrib teachers.

In 1992 when I was 16 years old I was given a copy of Marvin Rosenthal's book, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*. I dove in and ate up every word and prayerfully asked the Lord to reveal his truth. What I appreciated about Rosenthal's book is that it started with his personal story and how costly it was to his reputation and relationships, yet he continued to search for the truth. That had an impression on me and enabled me to be more open as I considered this new revelation.

While the first bit of rediscovery reading Rosenthal's book felt like a big change compared to the current teachings at the time, I really had a peace as I read through the book, and point after point made perfect sense. Before I had completed the book, I

was discussing with anyone who would listen that this view filled in the missing gaps of the other views without introducing any new concerns. It really appeared to be the view that the Bible intended. Furthermore, understanding this made the Bible so much more enjoyable to read. The book of Revelation made so much more sense than it had under a pretrib view, as well as Matthew 24 and many other end times passages.

When Robert Van Kampen's book *The Sign* came out, I ordered it immediately and ate up every word of his book too. I'm so thankful to both Rosenthal and Van Kampen for their scholarly early writings on the prewrath view. Since that time I've appreciated and followed Bible scholars like Charles Cooper, Ron Wallace of Bible Fragrances, and Alan Kurschner. More recently I've appreciated seeing rapture debates like the one between Alan Kurschner and Thomas Ice.

It has now been nearly 30 years since I was first introduced to the prewrath rapture view and I've seen growing acceptance, increasing gains in scholarly material, no strong counter-arguments, and I continue to have a strong peace that this is what the Bible teaches. This only further confirms that the prewrath rapture view describes when our Lord Jesus Christ will be returning as it relates to the 70th Week of Daniel. With God's grace and his forewarning, we as the Church can prepare ourselves for the times ahead.

— Scott Forsyth

From Michigan:

I am the pastor of a rural church in a small town in southern Michigan about 15 miles from where I grew up. My testimony of how I came to believe in the prewrath view goes back to my preteen years. My childhood church was filled with people who had a genuine fear of God but lacked good theological instruction. When I came to faith in Jesus Christ at the age of 12, I remember there was an enormous amount of discussion about the coming rapture taking place before the seven years of tribulation.

It wasn't until I began to attend bible college in 1982 that I heard of the prewrath perspective. The school I attended held strongly to a futurist, premillennial and pretribulational view of the rapture. It was an excellent

school; it taught me the Bible could be trusted because it was indeed the Word of God. It also taught the importance of using good hermeneutical principles when interpreting the Bible.

It was this emphasis, on the use of good hermeneutical principles that caused me to first question the pretribulation view. I recall two discussions I had in a class with my professor on Matthew 24. The first discussion was centered on whether or not Jesus was referring to the same rapture as Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4. The second was on the meaning of the fig tree in Matthew 24:32–35. My professor's explanations were centered more on his understanding of traditional dispensational theology, rather than on the hermeneutical principles I had been taught, such as context and comparing Scripture with Scripture.

Shortly after this encounter, two classmates spoke to me about the prewrath position. What they were saying seemed to be governed more by the use of hermeneutical principles than a theological presupposition. Later, in the early 90s I read Marvin Rosenthal's book, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*. As I read his book and began to study more in depth the timing of the rapture, it became very clear to me that the hermeneutical principles I had been taught were not consistent with a pretribulation view of the rapture.

As I began to read others who taught the prewrath position, such as Robert Van Kampen, Charles Cooper, Alan Kurschner, Chris White, Ryan Habbena, and others, I found that each emphasized taking the Scriptures at face value and was committed to applying sound hermeneutical principles consistently to the biblical text. This commitment to read out of the text rather than into the text is one of the strongest arguments for the prewrath view (in my opinion). The pre-wrath view is not contingent on one's theological view of the church and Israel, but is rather a biblical view of the rapture from the whole of Scripture.

— Trent Hammond

From California:

I have been married for seven years and during that time my husband tried to correct my eschatology view, which was the pretribulation rapture. He always said to me that he was afraid if my eschatology was wrong I would take the mark. When he was correcting me, I was hoping he was wrong, because I wanted to be raptured before the tribulation. I even prayed for him at that time because I thought he was off. Every time I read the Bible, Yeshua opened my eyes to see that pretrib was not right. My husband was so happy too when I told him that my Indonesian church just changed their eschatology view to prewrath. My Indonesian pastor was convicted by her daughters that the rapture was not going to happen before tribulation. These two young girls had a conversation when they hiked and the Holy Spirit led them to find the Truth.

My husband learned about prewrath because an elder in his dad's church was prewrath and corrected his eschatology view and his dad taught him. My husband said the bottom line is that 2 Thessalonians 2 makes pretrib rapture impossible.

— Fony
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