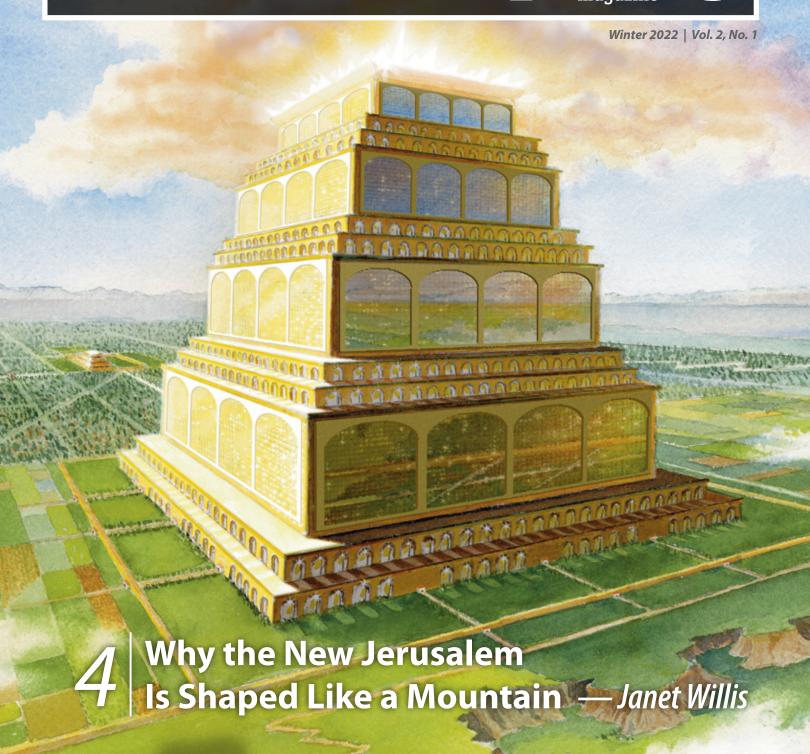
Biblical Prophecy



Looking for resources on biblical prophecy?







M

(G

Books, articles, podcast episodes, videos, MP3s, upcoming events & more!

alankurschner.com

BECOME AN ESCHATOS PARTNER

Join the Mission.

Biblical Prophecy

Table of Contents

Winter 2022 | Vol. 2, No. 1

Subscribe to the podcast



Email Updates

Sign up to receive updates from our blog!

AlanKurschner.com



Discover Resources at the



Shop at AlanKurschner.com



Why the New Jerusalem Is Shaped Like a Mountain

Janet Willis



Does the Term 'Watch' Refer to an Imminent Rapture?

Dr. Alan E. Kurschner



Letters of Encouragement

Biblical Prophecy Magazine

This is a triannual magazine published by Eschatos Ministries: Winter, Spring, Fall. © Copyright 2022 by Eschatos Network, LLC P.O. Box 747, Rice Lake, WI 54868 Printed in the USA by A Graphic Resource, Inc. All photos, unless otherwise noted, are © by iStockphoto.com All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without written permission.

PRODUCTION STAFF

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Alan E. Kurschner Copy Editor: Cheri Fields Graphic Design: Amanda Runge

POSTMASTER

For address changes, go to your account at alankurschner.com or send address change to: Eschatos Network, LLC, P.O. Box 747, Rice Lake, WI 54868

SUBSCRIPTIONS & REPRINTS

Biblical Prophecy Magazine is published in the U.S. and also available for international subscriptions. Go to AlanKurschner.com to sign up for a subscription to the magazine. Subscriptions are per issue (not annual). Subscription will renew automatically. Cancel anytime. PDF formats are available online. Single reprints are available for purchase at AlanKurschner.com

OUR MISSION

Eschatos Ministries proclaims the good news of God's salvation in this dark world, heralding the second coming of his Son, Jesus Christ. The magazine is committed to equipping readers with biblically-grounded articles that help Christians understand biblical prophecy on a much deeper level. To this end, we do not promote sensationalism by reading daily news back into Scripture. In addition, the purpose of the magazine is to inform readers of new resources.

Help support Eschatos Ministries by becoming an Eschatos Partner, giving on a monthly basis. Eschatos Partners receive a 100% discount (free) on all electronic products from the e-Store on the website (e.g. audio, charts, etc.). You will also receive new releases of books published by Eschatos Publishing as long as you remain an active partner. Last, but not least, you will receive a free subscription to this magazine! Sign up at: AlanKurschner.com/partner

You can also support the ministry with a one-time gift. Use the envelope in this magazine to send a check made out to Eschatos Ministries. Financial gifts are NOT tax-deductible. Eschatos Ministries, P.O. Box 747, Rice Lake, WI 54868

COVER IMAGE

Artwork by Janet Willis.



Why the New Jerusalem Is Shaped Like a Mountain

— Janet Willis

This article provides biblical and extra-biblical evidence that New Jerusalem is a structure shaped like a mountain.

God has graciously given believers a stunning picture of our future. The apostle John said, "I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (Rev 21:2). A whole city will come down from the sky. Nothing in the visual experience of humans quite compares to this. John continues, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell

with them" (Rev 21:3 ESV). John goes on to describe characteristics of this holy city, God's home, in the last two chapters of the Bible.

Down through the centuries believers have struggled to grasp the implications of these truths and imagine what this could possibly look like. Randall Price states, "Even the best of prophecy scholars and experts disagree on how to interpret the biblical doctrine of the New Jerusalem." As we examine this topic, we will see the tendency of some to allegorize the details given. Others say the prophets were groping for words

¹ All Scripture cited throughout are from the New American Standard Bible (1995) unless otherwise indicated.

² Randall Price, *Jerusalem in Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publisher, 1998), 304.

to describe the indescribable. It is our challenge to pray and study these descriptions and mine them for their treasures. We shall see that these prophecies are packed with details that are intended to be taken literally and be fulfilled as such.

Interpreters have seen how many Old Testament prophecies about Jerusalem seem to connect with the city described by the apostle John. A careful look at both Testaments reveals more details about this city than most people realize. Like scattered puzzle pieces on a table, it can be overwhelming. After all, in this case, we don't have the box top. But it is a puzzle that beckons to be assembled. As God's words help us picture our future with Him, we might be surprised to find truths that have been hiding in plain sight. Gradually, the puzzle can start to make sense as a harmony of the Old and New Testaments comes into focus. We can discover that God has graciously given us a clear picture of the long view.

Just as the person working out a puzzle usually starts by sorting out the pieces that are similar, we can begin by sorting characteristics of New Jerusalem into categories, such as shape, size, and timing of when the city will arrive. This is not an easy task, since multiple characteristics are often involved in one verse. To be clear, I take the position that the earth will be restored and New Jerusalem will descend before the Millennium. Future articles will address in detail the topic of timing as well as size. This article will focus on the overall contour of God's city.

New Jerusalem's shape is usually addressed with the following verse: "The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal" (Rev 21:16). Since John gives three dimensions, the length, the width, and the height, many have assumed that the city is a cube similar to the interior shape of the Holy of Holies.³ Other scholars believe the three dimensions can be indicating a pyramid shape. For example, Alva McClain leans in this direction when he says, "If the height of the city refers to the eminence upon which the city is set

(possibly formed by the twelve foundations arranged in pyramid fashion), then again the literal concept would be one of great architectural splendor. . . . What a sight such a city would be, gradually rising toward the sky by the great step-backs of its twelve-jeweled foundations." Paul Enns says the New Jerusalem is "possibly in the shape of a cone or pyramid, with God's throne at the top."5

When we look at Scripture itself, support for a pyramidal shape of God's city is extensive. God's dwelling place is most often called "the holy mountain of God." Zechariah gives an example of this by saying, "Thus says the Lord, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain" (Zech 8:3, emphasis mine). The prophet Isaiah provides us a remarkably specific picture: "Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain [har] of the house of the Lord will be established as [lit. "on"] the chief of the mountains [har], and will be raised above the hills [gibah]; and all the nations will stream to it" (Isa 2:2).

It almost sounds like Isaiah is saying in the last days all the nations will travel to visit a place that is like a mountain on top of a mountain. However, the Hebrew word "mountain" (har) can mean a plateau, a hill, or what is traditionally considered a peaked mountain. By comparing carefully all related Scriptures, this article will attempt to make the case that he is describing a peaked mountain shape structure that will be on top of a plateau.

Words of Precision

Ezekiel's vision of the future (Ezek 40–48) brings great clarity to this proposal. Many who have examined this portion of Scripture struggle with how to interpret the details the prophet presents. Let us keep an open mind, looking carefully at what is there, and ask God to help us understand His intent.

Ezekiel is taken into the land of Israel and shown "a structure like a city." This first mention of the

³ E.g. John MacArthur, The Glory of Heaven: The Truth about Heaven, Angels, and Eternal Life (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 118-19.

⁴ Alva J. McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2005), 512.

⁵ Paul Enns, The Moody Handbook of Theology (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2008), 392.

Ezekiel's Vision to Israel: the Jews	John's Vision to the Church: Jews and Gentiles
The city	The city
I. is on elevated land. Ezek 40:2	I. is on elevated land. Rev 21:10
2. is separate from the temple. Ezek 48:10	2. has no temple. Rev 21:22
3. has a square base. Ezek 48:30-34	3. has a square base. Rev 21:16
4. has twelve gates, three on each side. Ezek 48:30-34	4. has twelve gates, three on each side. Rev 21:12-13
5. gates named: 12 tribes of Israel. Ezek 48:30-34	5. gates named: 12 tribes of Israel. Rev 21:12-13
6. is located on land that is Most Holy. Ezek 43:12	6. is Holy. Rev 21:10 Foundations named: 12 apostles Rev 21:14
7. will be the place of God's throne (the capital of the world). Ezek 43:7	7. will be the place of God's throne (the capital of the world). Rev 22:3
8.The Lord will be there. Ezek 48:35	8.The Lord will be there. Rev 22:3
9. The Lord will be there forever. Ezek 48:35	9. The Lord will be there forever. Rev 22:3-4

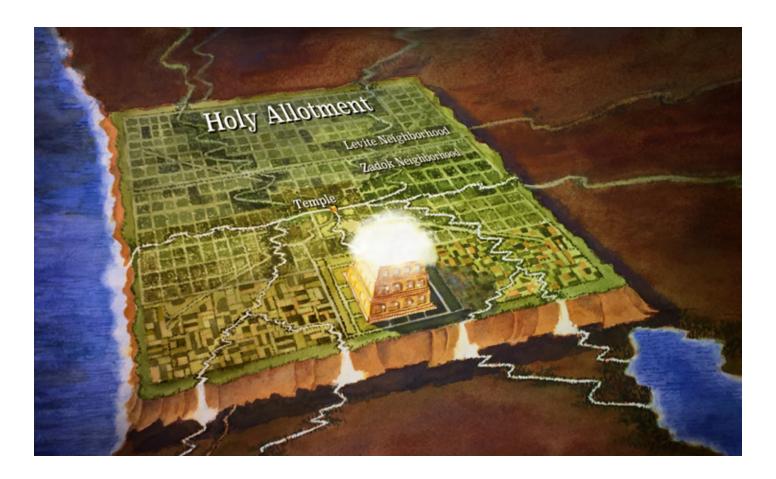
city reveals an intriguing clue concerning its overall appearance: "In the visions of God He brought me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain, and on it to the south there was a structure like a city" (Ezek 40:2 emphasis mine). We learn from the context the word "mountain" refers to a plateau which the prophet later calls the holy allotment (Ezek 45:1-7; Zech 14:10). He is given a detailed tour of a temple in the center of this holy allotment (Ezek 40:3-45:8; 48:10). Then at the end of his book he again talks about this structure on the south end of the plateau. His words are precise. A structure that looks like a city indicates it is a unified whole. The Spirit of God is helping him describe something unlike anything he has ever seen before. Later he calls that structure a city. The measurements he gives indicate the city is a separate entity from the temple (Ezek 48:10). This structure is square at the base and has three gates on each side named for the twelve tribes of Israel. These details are identical to the city John describes: a square base and twelve gates named for the twelve tribes.

Then Ezekiel concludes by giving us a critical piece of the puzzle: "The name of the city from that day shall be, 'The Lord is there'" (Ezek 48:35). The phrase "from that day" means this city is permanent, and yes, even eternal. Not only that, but the Lord is there.

In the New Testament, Jesus reinforces the concept of a "structure like a city" that was revealed to Ezekiel when He says, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places" (John 14:2).6 The Lord is quite specific: The Father's house is a single structure. The many dwelling places within it means it functions like a city. In biblical times this concept would need precise words since it would have been difficult for those cultures to comprehend. Today we have no such difficulty. Skyscrapers around the world dominate the landscape of our cities, including one that is over a half mile high.⁷ Many of these larger structures are like a

⁶ Note that Jesus implied the Father's house already existed even as He was on earth talking to His disciples. He didn't say the Father's house will have, but presently has many dwelling places.

⁷ The Burj Khalifa is 2,717 feet high.



self-contained city, with residences, offices, stores, and recreational spaces.

But what exactly is the shape of this structure that Ezekiel describes and Jesus refers to? The prophet Amos gives us a hint that God's home has a step pyramid shape: The One who builds his upper chambers in the heavens ... the Lord is His name" (Amos 9:6 emphasis mine). The phrase "upper chambers" (maalah) is most often translated as "stairway" or "steps." This is a possible clue that the unified structure that Ezekiel saw was a step-pyramid-shaped structure. Ezekiel was given a look into the future when the structure built by God that is now in the heavens, the Jerusalem "above," descends and lands on earth.8

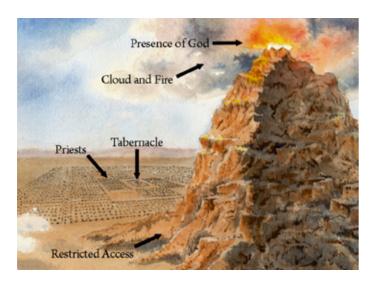
Interestingly, if we look at where else this Hebrew word is used, we find an additional clue about the shape of this future Jerusalem. The word maalah is translated "ascents" in the titles for Psalms 120-134 ("A Song of Ascents" or sometimes called "A Song of Steps"). The Israelites sang these songs as they ascended the steps to the temple in earthly Jerusalem. Within this

"Song of Steps" is a fascinating verse: "Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that is built as a city that is compact together" (Ps 122:2–3). Note the word translated "compact" (chabar) can mean "to couple, heap up, join." This is similar to a modern skyscraper. Each level or story is laid upon another, coupled and joined together, in effect forming a vertical city. Thus, this passage could be giving another hint about future Jerusalem. It could be a configuration of dwelling places that are stacked or built one upon another in the shape of a step pyramid.

This outward design of a step pyramid would be consistent with details of John's vision of New Jerusalem. He says, "The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev 21:14 ESV). The word "foundations" (themelios) can be defined as something laid down, or the horizontal part of a structure. In other words, the foundations are perpendicular to the vertical height. Since these twelve foundations are not necessarily equal in size or height,

⁸ Cf. Gal 4:26, "But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother."

⁹ A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, Brown, Driver, and Briggs.



a step pyramid design is feasible. In my artwork, I present a plausible conception of how the structure might look.

Extensive Evidence of a Pyramidal Shape

Once we start to grasp the concept of God's city as a pyramidal shaped structure, we can see evidence throughout the Bible. Numerous Old Testament references depict God's dwelling place as a mountain.

I was crying to the Lord with my voice, and He answered me from His holy mountain. (Ps 3:4)

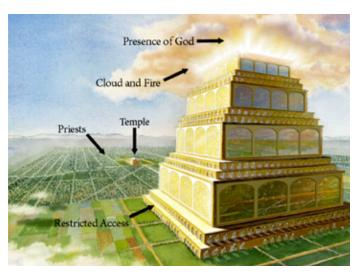
O Lord, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? (Ps 15:1)

His foundation is in the holy mountains. The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the other dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God. (Ps 87:1–3)

But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain. (Ps 2:6)

He who takes refuge in Me will inherit the land and will possess My holy mountain. (Isa 57:13b)

I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, and an heir of My mountains from Judah; even My chosen ones shall inherit it, and My servants will dwell there. Sharon will be a pasture land for flocks, and the valley of Achor a resting place for herds, for My people who seek Me. But you who forsake the Lord, who forget My holy mountain, who set a table for Fortune, and who fill cups with mixed



wine for Destiny, I will destine you for the sword. (Isa 65:9–12a)

The following psalm compares Bashan, a mountain range in Israel noted for its height, to the future height of God's holy mountain. "A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan; a mountain of many peaks is the mountain of Bashan. Why do you look with envy, O mountains with many peaks, at the mountain which God has desired for His abode? Surely the Lord will dwell there forever" (Ps 68:15-16 emphasis mine). This is a fascinating passage. God's future dwelling place will be the highest point on earth and make the mountains of Bashan envious (figuratively speaking).¹⁰ Psalm 48:1-2 reinforces this concept: "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion in the far north, the city of the great King." According to Elliot's Commentary for *English Readers*, the word "elevation" (*noph*) is "A word only found here, but explained from a cognate Arabic word to mean elevation. And this feature is quite distinctive enough of Jerusalem to lend confirmation to this explanation—'It's elevation is remarkable." 11

This picture of God's dwelling as a mountain was promised to the fledgling nation of Israel way back in the book of Exodus. Moses said, "You will bring them and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, the place, O Lord, which You have made for Your

 $^{^{10}}$ Again, a future article will address in detail the issues of size and timing.

¹¹ https://biblehub.com/psalms/48-2.htm#commentary

dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established. The Lord shall reign forever and ever" (Ex 15:17-18). Not long after Moses said these words, the people arrived at Sinai. As we will see in the book of Hebrews, the mountain they saw was a type of something yet future. Then when they arrived in the promised land, they worshipped on the natural hill of Jerusalem at the temple. But that too was temporary. The fulfillment of Exod 15:17-18 is still future: "when the Lord shall reign forever and ever" from "the mountain," the dwelling place made by God.

The Mount Sinai Connection

The case for a pyramid-shaped New Jerusalem gets even stronger when we take a close look at what occurred at Sinai. God's presence was manifested by the cloud and fire at the top of Mount Sinai (Ex 24:16-17). Only a chosen few were allowed to go up into His presence. Most were not even allowed to touch the mountain, for God had said, "Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it" (Ex 19:23). God also directed the overall layout near Mount Sinai. The tent dwellings of the Israelites were at the base of the mountain, and the worship center or tabernacle was in the midst of those dwellings. The tents of the Levites, the priestly tribe, had the privilege of being the closest, surrounding the tabernacle.

The picture of Sinai pointed beyond this, toward something that has not yet been fulfilled. If we look at Ezekiel's entire layout of the Holy Allotment, and if we are correct that the city at the south end is a mountain shape, the full configuration echoes the layout at Mount Sinai. Someday God will dwell "in the mountain of [His] inheritance" where He will "reign forever and ever" (Ex 15:17-18). God will live in that mountain-like structure, New Jerusalem, and rule and reign from that location.

When we add the details from John's vision of New Jerusalem, the harmony is amazing. At the time God's city lands on the earth, access to it will be restricted to immortals. John tells us, "Nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev 21:27). John even tells us that though the twelve gates are always open, an angel guards each gate (Rev 21:12, 25). John tells us he saw



no temple in the city (Rev 21:22). This concurs with Ezekiel's layout. A temple where mortals can worship during the Millennium will be separate from the city, in the center of the Holy Allotment (Ezek 48:10). Just like the priestly tribe of Levi set up their tents around the tabernacle, the mortal descendants of the Levitical priestly family of Zadok will live around the immediate perimeter of Ezekiel's Temple (Ezek 48:10-12). The rest of the descendants of the tribe of Levi will live in the adjacent portion to the north (Ezek 48:13).

Just like the manifestation of God's presence descended from Mount Sinai to the tabernacle, God's presence will descend to the temple on the Holy Allotment. Ezekiel gives some details of this future temple worship. Speaking of the gate of the inner court facing east he says, "The people of the land shall also worship at the doorway of that gate before the Lord on the sabbaths and on the new moons" (Ezek 46:3).

In a lengthy portion, the New Testament confirms this connection, making direct comparisons between Mount Sinai and New Jerusalem (Heb 12:18-29). This section discusses the similarities and differences in great detail, with the implication that New Jerusalem will have a mountain shape similar to Mount Sinai.

For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched . . . And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling." But you have come to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (Heb 12:18-24)

Just like the people near Mount Sinai experienced the earth shaking, someday not just earth but also heaven will be shaken. "And [God's] voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.' This expression, 'Yet once more,' denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain" (Heb 12:26-27). The Old Testament quote within this New Testament verse comes from the prophet Haggai who states, "For thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land" (Hag 2:6). This refers to the topographical reconfiguration that God will bring just prior to the setting up of His kingdom. After catastrophic change of both the earth and the heavens, "things which cannot be shaken" will remain. 12 The mountain of Sinai, which represented what is temporary, will be replaced by something permanent, God's holy mountain, New Jerusalem.

One more fascinating prophecy also shows a striking similarity between Mount Sinai and New Jerusalem. Isaiah tells us about an immense cloud canopy "over the whole area of Mount Zion" which will provide a special protection over God's mountain-shaped city. "Then the Lord will create over the whole area of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory will be a canopy. There will be a shelter to give shade from the heat by day, and refuge and protection from the storm and the rain" (Isa 4:5-6). This future canopy was prefigured by the cloud and fire that was over Mount Sinai, indicating God's presence (Exod 19:18; 24:15-17).

Separate Distinct Places

The fact that there are two distinct places on the Holy Allotment must not be missed. God told Ezekiel, "I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people" (Ezek 37:26-27). If New Jerusalem is a huge enclosed structure separate from the temple, it would make sense that it needs its own light source. A huge skyscraper needs lighting throughout its interior. And this is exactly what John says: "And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev 21:23). This is not saying that the sun does not exist, but that the city has no need of it. Isaiah had foretold this hundreds of years before John: "No longer will you have the sun for light by day, nor for brightness will the moon give you light; but you will have the Lord for an everlasting light, and your God for your glory. Your sun will no longer set, nor will your moon wane; for you will have the Lord for an everlasting light, and the days of your mourning will be over" (Isa 60:19-20). He is predicting that a future Jerusalem will have the Lord for its light source. The pronouns "you" and "your" throughout this chapter refer to that future city: "And they will call you the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Whereas you have been forsaken and hated with no one passing through, I will make you an everlasting pride, a joy from generation to generation" (Isa 60:14-15). In other words, appropriately for the immortal inhabitants, New Jerusalem is a city that never sleeps! When John says, "There shall be no night there" (Rev 22:5 KJV), the context is inside New Jerusalem.

So far, we have seen evidence from both the Old and New Testaments indicating that New Jerusalem is likely a pyramid-shaped, self-contained structure in heaven but will someday come to earth. Thus, a question arises. Since this will be the paradise that will be regained, could this be the actual paradise that was lost?

Hints from the Ancient Past

Scholars have long speculated that in the beginning God's Holy Mountain was on earth. Ezekiel hints at this, giving us a glimpse into the past. The following passages reveal that Satan once had a privileged position "on the holy mountain of God." He was cast down from that mountain because sin was found in him.

¹² See Rev 16:17-18; Zech 14:10; Isa 40:4-5, 9; Mic 1:3-4; Jer 4:24-26; Nah 1:5-6; Isa 24:1, 18b-20.



You were in Eden, the garden of God . . . You were the anointed cherub who covers, and I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; you walked in the midst of the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you . . . And you sinned; therefore, I have cast you as profane from the mountain of God . . . I cast you to the ground. (Ezek 28:13–17 emphasis mine)

These verses indicate that the location of Eden was on that holy mountain. In addition, the fact that four rivers had their source in Eden implies that it was elevated (Gen 2:10-14).¹³ In fact, it is possible that the first chapter of Genesis reinforces the idea that the place where God dwelt was on this earth. "And God called the firmament Heaven" (Gen 1:8a KJV). The word "firmament" (raqia) when it stands alone (as opposed to "firmament of the heavens") represents pressed solid, referring out to the crust. In other words, the verse could read, "God called the earth's crust Heaven." 14 According to this interpretation, Eden was on God's Holy Mountain or God's dwelling place. Thus, heaven was on earth. Extra-biblical sources concur with this idea. For example, J. Julius Scott Jr. states:

This was a common assumption at Qumran. According to 2 Baruch 4, the heavenly Jerusalem originally stood in Paradise; but after Adam sinned, it was taken to and preserved in heaven. It was shown

to Abraham in a vision and to Moses on Mount Sinai. According to 2 Esdras 10:44-59, Ezra also had a vision of the heavenly city.¹⁵

After the Fall, we are not told that God moved Eden to another place but that He put cherubim at the entrance to prevent Adam and Eve from eating from the Tree of Life. If God did not remove His Holy Mountain up into another realm right away, then ancient peoples of the world would have some knowledge of what at least the exterior of God's home looked like. God's Holy Mountain then would have been removed before the world-wide flood. Interestingly, the first thing people did when they began to repopulate the earth after the flood was build a city with a tower. "They said, 'Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven" (Gen 11:4). The Hebrew word for tower. migdal, could sometimes refer to a pyramid-shaped structure.16 The Tower of Babel would likely have been similar in structure and as such function as an imitation of God's Holy Mountain.

¹³ For a discussion with diagrams about heaven on earth, see Randall Price, The Temple and Bible Prophecy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2005), 193-95.

¹⁴ For further discussion of ragia, see Walt Brown, In the Beginning (Phoenix: Center for Scientific Creation, 2008), 365-68.

¹⁵ J. Julius Scott Jr., Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995), 291 n37.

¹⁶ E.g. "an elevated area such as a garden with mounds, terraces" Kohlenberger/ Concise Hebrew-Aramaic Mounce Dictionary of the Old Testament; "raised bed" Brown, Driver, Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament; "a (pyramidal) bed of flowers" Key Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic: Based upon the Strong's Hebrew Dictionary.









Extra-Biblical Evidence

We cannot be sure from Scripture whether the structure of God's city was visible to the antediluvian world. However, we do see evidence that ancient cultures wrote of their beliefs along this line. Some scholars studying these cultures are quite specific. John H. Walton writes:

The best indication of the function of the ziggurats comes from the names that are given to them. For instance, the name of the ziggurat at Babylon, Etemenanki, means "temple of the foundation of heaven and earth." One at Larsa means "temple that links heaven and earth." Most significant is the name of the ziggurat at Sipper, "temple of the stairway to pure heaven." . . . At the top of the ziggurat was the gate of the gods, the entrance into their heavily abode. At the bottom was the temple, where the people hoped the god would descend to receive the gifts and worship of his/her people.¹⁷

A vast amount of archeological evidence around the world confirms that ancient civilizations connected belief in an afterlife with a mountainlike shape. All over the earth, ancient people groups built pyramids. Besides the famous pyramids in Egypt, these structures are found in Greece, Mesopotamia, India, China, Mexico, and areas of North America.

Since many of these civilizations had near-biblical creation and

¹⁷ John H. Walton, Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 121–24.

flood stories and sacrificial rites prior to the writing of the Old Testament, it is most certain that these postflood people groups had some knowledge of God's Holy City that was passed on by word of mouth from Adam through Noah and his descendants.¹⁸ Maybe they were following Babel's example. The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible states:

The most pronounced feature of Mesopotamian temple architecture was the ziggurat. The lavish expenditure of labor required for the erection of these artificial mountains and their centrality to the cult has caused a general scholarly agreement that the structures represent the mythological cosmic mountain.19

A recent discovery by archeologists in the Middle East found ancient graves of some 600 workers, and some of the graves had mini pyramids on them that were several feet high. They felt this discovery could indicate that the idea of pyramid-type structures in relation to the afterlife was a belief held first by the common people and later used by kings.²⁰ Without inspired writings from God, oral accounts of what God's home had looked like, and who could go there, became twisted and corrupted. Lorna Oakes and Lucia Gahlin state:

The Step Pyramid itself developed from the mudbrick royal mastabas of the Early Dynastic Period (c. 3100-c. 2686 BC) at Abydos. . . . The mudbrick mastaba developed into a stone-built tower, and the mound became a ladder, which the king climbed to join the "imperishable stars," a claim made in the Pyramid Texts, the funerary texts that accompanied royal burials during the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period (c.2686-2055 BC)." 21

Oakes and Gahlin go on to say, "The Pyramid Texts are a collection of spells that were meant to ensure the resurrection of the king and his union with the gods in the sky." ²² Djoser's pyramid (2670-2650 BC) is considered the earliest cut-stone, man-made pyramid and predates the pyramids of Giza. Speaking of Djoser's pyramid in Egypt, Oakes and Gahlin say,

Its bold shape—six great tiers of decreasing size—announced a divine truth that the humblest passerby in Djoser's time understood. The Step Pyramid was a ladder. Not the symbol of a ladder but an actual one, by which the soul of the dead ruler might climb to the sky, joining the gods in immortality.²³

About 1500 years after the Djoser pyramid was built, visitors wrote this graffiti on it: "The scribe Ahmose, son of Iptah, came to see the temple of Djoser. He found it as though heaven were within it, Re rising in it."24 In fact, according to James Putnam, "The word pharaoh means 'great house' and originally referred to the palace rather than the king." 25 He also states, "The Arabs used to call the Great Pyramid 'the mountain of Pharaoh'" (emphasis mine).26 Putting these two definitions together, the pyramid structure could have been called "the mountain of the great house."

Researchers who have a biblical worldview have raised questions as to the motivation behind this massive worldwide phenomenon of pyramid building. In the following quotes, Don Landis raises interesting questions, not specifically referring to New Jerusalem but to the people who built Babel: "Where did this idea of a city come from?" And concerning the tower he says, "It appears the tower was built as a

¹⁸ Apparently, some people that lived in the antediluvian and patriarchal ages had knowledge of certain truths, although we are not told exactly how they knew those truths. For example, Cain and Abel knew to bring sacrifices (Gen 4:3-4); Enoch knew the Lord would come with 10,000 of His saints in a time of judgment (Jude 14-15); Noah knew the difference between clean and unclean animals (Gen 7:2); Job knew he would someday have a bodily resurrection and knew his Redeemer would someday stand on the earth (Job 19:25-26); and Abraham knew about the city God made (Heb 11:8-10).

¹⁹ The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 666.

²⁰ David Roberts, *National Geographic* (January 1995), 15.

²¹ Lorna Oakes and Lucia Gahlin, Ancient Egypt (London: Hermes House 2002), 46.

²² Oakes and Gahlin, Ancient Egypt, 52.

²³ Oakes and Gahlin, "Age of Pyramids," National Geographic (January 1995), 7.

²⁴ Oakes and Gahlin, *Ancient Egypt*, 91.

²⁵ James Putnam, Eyewitness Pyramid (New York: DK Publishing,

²⁶ Putnam, Eyewitness Pyramid, 20.

counterfeit mountain." After giving extensive evidence of thousands of man-made mountains found all over the earth, he states, "The fact that these structures are so common and their architecture is so similar directly links them to each other and the original Tower of Babel." He goes on to say, "These first ziggurats and pyramids were a distortion of God's original design . . . Since Satan cannot create but only pervert, the origin of these towers must come back to God." 27

In studying the ancient pyramids, we find other parallels. Many times, a temple was in front of the pyramid, connected by a special roadway. The temple was there for mortals to worship, while the pyramid was a house for a pharaoh that had hopes of immortality. One pyramid text says, "Stand at the gates which bar the common people! The gatekeeper comes out to you, He grasps your hand, takes you into heaven, to your father Geb. He rejoices at your coming, Gives you his hands." 28 Other structures surrounded the temple and were used as dwelling places for the priests. In fact, reconstructed models of the city of Babylon show this same configuration. All of this echoes Ezekiel's layout in the Holy Allotment. We know that Ezekiel was carried away as a captive to Babylon during the deportation in 597 BC. Some might think that when he saw Babylon, he then wrote his prophecy, copying what he saw. To the contrary, what he saw was more likely an imitation or copy of God's original.

El Shaddai

Important information about the shape of New Jerusalem can also be gleaned from the study of one of the names for God. The Hebrew expression El Shaddai in the past was usually translated "Almighty." However, the Theological Word Book of the Old Testament states,

The translation "Almighty" goes back to ancient times, at least as far back as the LXX, which translates shadday as pantokrator "all powerful." . . . In recent times these earlier suggestions have been all but rejected and new ones have been put in their place. . . . the most widely accepted today, is that shadday is to be connected with the Akkadian

word, sadu "mountain." Thus El Shaddai would translate into English something like "God/El of the mountain," i.e. God's abode.²⁹

This definition is a strong indication that the city is pyramidal in shape. The most frequent use of this word is early in the historical record, pointing to the possibility that at least some of the antediluvian population knew about this pyramidal shaped dwelling place of God. El Shaddai is the name by which God repeatedly identified Himself early in biblical history. The book of Job, considered by some to be the oldest book in the Bible, uses the word shaddai ("mountain" or "mountain dweller") as a name for God thirty-one times. Nearly every person throughout the story of Job refers to God with this term. And at its conclusion, God identifies Himself to Job by this name (Job 40:2). Interestingly, Job addresses God saying, "I know that You will bring me to death and to the house of meeting for all living" (Job 30:23 emphasis mine). Job referred to a particular structure where he would go after he died. It is evidently large enough to house all those eligible for eternal life.

In addition, still very early in the biblical record, the Lord says to Abraham, "I am the Almighty God [El Shaddai, or, God of the mountain]" (Gen 17:1). Then Isaac, when passing the covenant promises to Jacob, carefully communicates how God identified Himself again as "God of the mountain" (Gen 28:3). About 500 years later when talking to Moses, God points back to this earlier age saying, "I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, by the name of God Almighty [God of the mountain]" (Exod 6:3).

In light of all this, the theory proposed gains strength concerning Eden and the antediluvian world. Since God chose to identify Himself during the first millennia after the flood as God of the mountain, it seems likely that details about what God's dwelling place looked like were known to human inhabitants on earth prior to the flood. This might also explain why Abraham "was looking for the city which has foundations [themelios], whose architect and builder is God" (Heb 11:10).

El Shaddai as a name for God also forms a significant

²⁷ Don Landis, ed., *The Genius of Ancient Man* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2012), 21, 22, 32, 63.

²⁸ Oakes and Gahlin, *Ancient Egypt*, 53.

²⁹ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological* Word Book of the Old Testament (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1980), 907.



word picture in three other books of the Bible: Psalms, Joel, and Ezekiel. The psalmist David gives multiple references to God's home throughout Ps 68. David first refers to the present location of God: "A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, Is God in His holy habitation" (v. 5). As David then looks back into the past, he mentions God's presence on Sinai: "The earth quaked; the heavens also dropped rain at the presence of God; Sinai itself quaked at the presence of God, the God of Israel" (v. 8). David then gives a prophecy about the future appearance and location of the permanent dwelling place of God: "A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan; a mountain of many peaks is the mountain of Bashan. Why do you look with envy, O mountains with many peaks, at the mountain which God has desired for His abode? Surely the Lord will dwell there forever. The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; The Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness" (Ps 68:15-17).

In the midst of all of David's comparisons is a reference to the Almighty [Shaddai or "mountain dweller"]: "Kings of armies flee, they flee, and she who remains at home will divide the spoil! When you lie down among the sheepfolds, you are like the wings of a dove covered with silver, and its pinions with glistening gold. When the Almighty ["God of the mountain"] scattered the kings there [lit. 'in it'], it was snowing in Zalmon" (Ps 68:11-14). The psalm then concludes with a vivid and enticing picture of the future kingdom: The tribes of Benjamin, Judah, Zebulun, and Naphtali are ruling (vv. 26-27). Kings are bringing gifts to God's temple in Jerusalem (v. 29). God has "scattered the peoples who delight in war" (v. 30). Envoys come from Egypt and Ethiopia (v. 31). David then says, "Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth" (v. 32), to the One who "rides

upon the highest heavens, which are from ancient times (v. 33). This phrase in Hebrew literally means "the heaven of heavens of old." Taken in context with the entire psalm, it is possible that the phrase could be referring to the holy mountain that was God's dwelling place which was known to the ancient world. Thus, characteristics of God's abode are shown to be uniform from the past on into the future. David concludes by saying, "O God, You are awesome from your sanctuary [or holy places]" (v. 35).

Many years after David's reign, the prophet Joel gave a critical prophecy that connected this One known from ancient times as the God of the mountain with an event that is yet future. "Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty [God of the mountain]" (Joel 1:15). The "day of the Lord" is the future time of judgment described in detail not only by Joel, but also by many other writers of the Old and New Testaments, including John in Revelation. Thus, Joel connected an ancient name for God with the future. The God of the mountain someday will come bringing justice to the world.

Then one final use of this word takes us one final step into the future. After the day of the Lord, God will set up His kingdom. In the opening chapters of his book, the prophet Ezekiel used this name for God as he described a vision related to that kingdom. Ezekiel carefully described details about



the cherubim and the wheeled chariot with God on His throne, and said the sound was "like the voice of God Almighty [God of the mountain] when He speaks" (Ezek 1:24, 10:5). Ezekiel describes how God's presence left the land of Israel and how He will return in the future. Then the closing chapters of Ezekiel's book paint a picture of what God's coming kingdom will look like at that time. He talks about a "structure like a city" on a future Holy Allotment. He sees the glory of God on His throne; the God of the mountain coming to a temple on this holy portion of land, but separate from the city-like structure. If that structure is New Jerusalem in the shape of a mountain on the Holy Allotment, then we can visualize the following picture: The glory of God (God on His throne) will someday dwell with His immortal resurrected saints in His mountain that has descended upon earth. At specific times, the new moon and Sabbaths, He will come down from His mountain to meet with His mortal people in the Temple. Thus, the paradise that was lost will be restored as all of God's people, mortal and immortal, dwell with their God, "God of the mountain." Our antediluvian past relates to our eschatological future.

Conclusion

Now we can step back and review the reasons New Jerusalem is most likely a pyramid-shape structure.

• Numerous references throughout the Bible use the word mountain when referring to God's abode.

- We compared the precise words of Ezek 40:2 ("Structure like a city") to John 14:2 ("In My Father's house are many dwelling places"). Biblical authors guided by the Holy Spirit were describing accurately something they had never seen before. Today, we have no problem understanding how variously shaped structures can function as a self-contained city with extraordinary height, from a modern skyscraper.
- We saw how other Scripture can harmonize with the triangular shape. God's heavenly "stories" could mean steps (Amos 9:6), implying that the structure like a city could be shaped like a step pyramid. Even the twelve foundations (Rev 21:14) could be decreasing in width for each level.
- Mount Sinai itself was put forth as a type of God's home, New Jerusalem. Hebrews 12:18-29 made the connection between the two mountains plain. We then matched these descriptions with details of Ezekiel's Holy Allotment. Comparing these two sites, five parallels came to light: the restricted access to the mountain, and the locations of the following, the priest's residences, the Tabernacle (and Ezekiel's Temple), the cloud and fire, and the presence of God.
- It was important to note that both Ezekiel and John let us know there will be two distinct places, the sanctuary and God's dwelling place (Ezek 37:26–27; Rev 21:22). This was pictured in

the past by God's presence on top of Mount Sinai and a separate place for worship at the Tabernacle.

- We looked at how the prophet Ezekiel spoke of Eden as God's holy mountain (Ezek 28:13–17), indicating that the city might have been in existence from the beginning of creation and was possibly visible to our antediluvian ancestors.
- Post-flood people groups all over the earth obviously had something that strongly motivated them to build massive man-made mountains.
 And their writings show that many thought of these structures as representing the dwelling place of their gods.
- The Hebrew name for God, El Shaddai, pointed to this: God of the Mountain. It was particularly important to see the time frame when this name was used.

We can now picture what this structure like a city might look like, the biblically-based possibility of a mountain-like home. What an exciting prospect to imagine that as resurrected saints finally free from sin we will rule and reign with Christ. As immortals, we will be active on various assignments, enjoying not only the entire earth, but maybe even the entire universe. What a marvelous privilege to have New Jerusalem as our true home. But best of all, what joy it will be to dwell with God! His city here on earth will be a visible manifestation of His love, His mercy.

Thus, we have examined the big picture concerning the shape New Jerusalem will have. Though the puzzle has taken shape, questions remain: Where is New Jerusalem now? How big is it? When will New Jerusalem appear and descend to earth? These will be addressed in a future article. As we examine carefully both the Old and New Testaments, we will find God gives a surprising amount of information about the size and the timing of when God's city arrives.



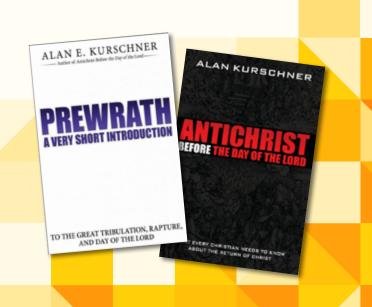
Janet Willis is the author of What on Earth is Heaven Like?: A Look at God's City, New Jerusalem, and the children's book God's Got a House and It's Coming to Earth. For more resources go to scottandjanetwillis.com.

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?





Does the Term 'Watch' Refer to an Imminent Rapture?

— Dr. Alan E. Kurschner



In this article I will address two types of biblical watchfulness. The first type—and the one I will focus on—is spiritual watchfulness. The second type is physical watchfulness. We can think of the first type as an inward orientation, while the second type is an outward orientation.

Spiritual Watchfulness

The Bible employs a variety of words to denote the concept of watchfulness in the sense of spiritual vigilance.1 The interpreter, then, should be careful not to assume that any single word means the same thing as the entire concept. This is a form of the word-concept fallacy, also known as the theological-concept fallacy or "concordance method" of interpretation. It is an assumption that studying a single word or phrase corresponds to having studied the entire concept. One should not simply open a concordance and finger down the page looking for instances of a single word and stop there. This can be a beginning point for study, but there is an important difference between studying a biblical concept and studying the meaning of a word. For example, if we want to learn what the Bible teaches about love, it would be a mistake to restrict our study to the word agapē, because there are many terms describing different aspects of love. We need to take Scripture in a contextual sense and recognize synonyms and phrases that describe a concept rather than collapsing an entire concept into a single term. Moisés Silva gives this additional example: "A very important passage on the subject of hypocrisy is Isaiah 1:10-15, but the student suckled at the concordance would never find [the word hypocrisy]; instead, he would come to an unrefined understanding of the topic." 2 We must therefore be careful not to assume that if a passage lacks a particular word, then the concept is missing, or vice versa, if a passage contains a particular

word the entire concept is conveyed.³

Having established this principle of word study, a common Greek term that I will focus on is grēgoreō, which means to stay awake, to be in constant readiness. Another sense of the term is fully alive, which is used at least once in an eschatological context: "He died for us so that whether we are alert or asleep we will come to life together with him" (1 Thess 5:10).⁴ It is rendered in English translations as "watch," "alert," "awake," "to stay awake," "to be in constant readiness," or, when the context calls for it, in a literal sense "to remain fully alive." 5 I will focus on this term because pretribulationists have construed it to refer to an "imminent rapture." They argue that it makes no sense to have the biblical injunction "to watch" for Jesus's coming if we know there will be intervening events that must happen first. For example, if Jesus's coming for his church occurs after the great tribulation, how can someone "watch" for his return knowing that he is not returning today? Thus, they conclude the rapture must be the next event on the prophetic calendar for the church. We will go through each instance of this term found in eschatological contexts and ask whether there is any sense of imminence in these contexts. Grēgoreō is used twenty-two times

¹ For example, the Greek lexicon by Louw and Nida (NA) lists many terms under the following semantic domains: "Ready, Prepared," "Be Ready To Learn, Pay Attention." 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).

² Moisés Silva, Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 27.

³ For more on the word-concept fallacy, see Alan E. Kurschner, "James Barr on the 'Illegitimate Totality Transfer' Word-Concept Fallacy," in James Barr Assessed: Evaluating His Legacy over the Last Sixty Years, edited by Stanley E. Porter, Biblical Interpretation Series 192 (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 70-89; D. A. Carson, Exegetical Fallacies, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 27-64.

⁴ All Scripture translations cited throughout are from the New English Translation unless otherwise indicated.

⁵ Cf. (BDAG) 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).

⁶ Robert L. Thomas, "The Doctrine of Imminence in Two Recent Eschatological Systems," Bibliotheca Sacra 157 (2000): 457, 462; Charles L. Holman, "The Idea of an Imminent Parousia in the Synoptic Gospels," Studia Biblica et Theologica 3 (1973): 17; Paul D. Feinberg, "Response: Paul D. Feinberg," in Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational? (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 154; Renald Showers, Maranatha Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel, 1995), 203; Gerald B. Stanton, Kept from the Hour: Biblical Evidence for the Pretribulational Return of Christ (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle Publishing, 1991), 127.

in the Greek New Testament with twelve of these instances specifically eschatological.⁷ Of these twelve instances, seven are found in the Olivet Discourse, two are found in Paul's Thessalonian epistles, and three in the book of Revelation. We shall take them in order starting with the Olivet Discourse.

Instances of Gregoreo in the Olivet Discourse

Matt 24:42 Therefore stay alert [grēgoreō], because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

Matt 24:43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have been alert [grēgoreō] and would not have let his house be broken into.

Matt 25:13 Therefore stay alert [grēgoreō], because you do not know the day or the hour.

Mark 13:34 It is like a man going on a journey. He left his house and put his slaves in charge, assigning to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to stay alert [grēgoreō].

Mark 13:35 Stay alert [grēgoreō], then, because you do not know when the owner of the house will return—whether during evening, at midnight, when the rooster crows, or at dawn.

Mark 13:37 What I say to you I say to everyone: Stay alert! [grēgoreō].

Luke 12:37 Blessed are those slaves whom their master finds alert [grēgoreō] when he returns! I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, have them take their place at the table, and will come and wait on them!

If these verses are read in isolation without consideration to their contexts, they can lead one to think there are no warnings or signs to Jesus's second coming, suggesting an imminent rapture. For example, pretribulationist Robert L. Thomas agrees with Charles L. Holman when he construes watchfulness in the Olivet Discourse as imminence: "In the

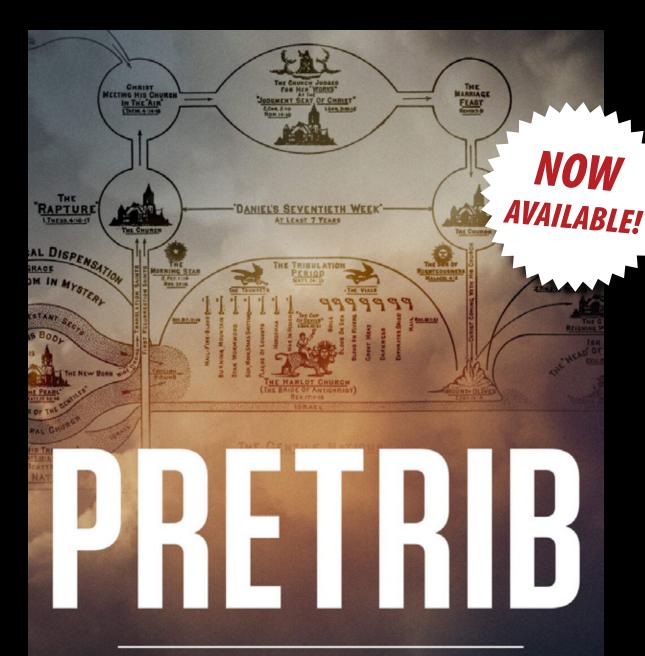
parables which exhort the disciples to watchfulness for the parousia . . . the idea of imminence is implicit, otherwise, why would the disciples need to watch for His coming?"8

A contextual reading, however, of these verses reveal that each of these instances of grēgoreō in the narrative of the Olivet Discourse is preceded by prophesied events. There are two main sections to Matthew's account of the Olivet Discourse: what will happen (24:1-31), and how to live in light of what will happen (24:32—25:46). Matthew's three instances of grēgoreō in 24:42, 43, and 25:13 are found in the second section, where Jesus employs devices such as similitudes, illustrations, and parables. The exhortation to watch in Matt 24:42 concludes with two similitudes. The instance in Matt 24:43 depicts a house-owner similitude. And Matt 25:13 is found in the context of the parable of separating five prepared virgins from five unprepared. These instances link back to verses 30-31 and serve to illustrate the great separation event that will occur at Jesus's return when the elect are taken to Jesus and the unrighteous are left behind: "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. 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 24:30-31).

This timeline depicts discernable events that must happen before Jesus's return. Pretribulationists such as Thomas lift these "watch" verses out of their contexts and isolate them, giving the impression that they refer to imminence. The context, however, shows that Jesus is instilling spiritual preparedness into believers, so they do not find themselves unprepared when Jesus returns. He is teaching that since his return is delayed—the opposite of imminent—believers should not become apathetic, lest the Son of Man come back at a point in their life when they are not ready. Moreover, we should not forget the main question that prompted Jesus's discourse in the first place where his disciples asked what the sign to his coming would be. Jesus did not reply by saying that his return

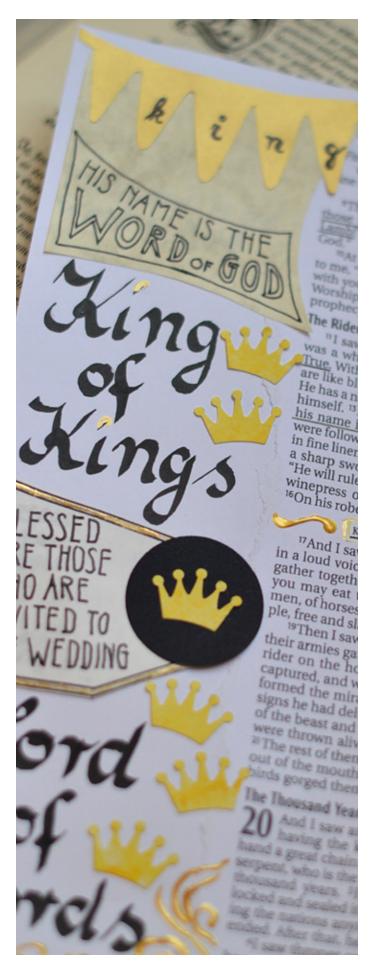
⁷ The bold instances are eschatological: **Matt 24:42–43**; **25:13**; 26:38, 40-41; Mark 13:34-35, 37; 14:34, 37-38; Luke 12:37; Acts 20:31; 1 Cor 16:13; Col 4:2; 1 Thess 5:6, 10; 1 Pet 5:8; Rev 3:2-3; 16:15.

⁸ Thomas, "Doctrine of Imminence," 457.



Examining the Foundations of Pretribulation Rapture Theology

ALAN E. KURSCHNER



was imminent. Rather, he gave them a concrete, prophesied sign that would be unmistakable:

As he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, his disciples came to him privately and said, 'Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?' ... For just like the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so the coming of the Son of Man will be. . . . 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 24:3, 27, 30)

In addition, Jesus revealed to them more than the sign to his coming; he warned them that a cluster of hardships would come upon the generation who lived at that time: false christs (vv. 5, 24), wars (vv. 6–7), famines and earthquakes (v. 7), martyrdom, hatred of Christians (v. 9), apostasy, betrayal (v. 10), false prophets (vv. 11, 24), lawlessness, indifference (v. 12), the arrival of the Antichrist and the rebuilt temple (v. 15), and the great tribulation (vv. 15–22). With all these trials and tribulations that could deflect Christians from their spiritual vigilance, it is not surprising that Jesus exhorts us to watch.

Some may object that these instances of gregoreo relate to the statement in Matt 24:36 that no one knows the day or hour; therefore, they would argue that grēgoreō is believed to refer to imminence. First, not knowing the day or hour of an event does not preclude intervening events. The logic does not follow. As demonstrated above, before his return that Jesus refers to in Matt 24:36, Jesus gives a cluster of events and signs that must occur first. And in the same context, Jesus assures us that we can know the season when believers can discern events that will happen before his return: "Learn this parable from the fig tree: Whenever its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also you, when you see all these things, know that he is near, right at the door" (Matt 24:32-33, emphasis mine). So while we will not know the exact day or hour, watchful believers will know the season and should not be caught off guard.

Not all pretribulationists are on the same page as Thomas. For example, John F. Walvoord believes the term grēgoreō is used differently by Jesus. Walvoord applies the instances of grēgoreō in Matt 24:42 or 25:13 to so-called tribulation saints: "Watching for the return of the Lord to establish the kingdom is related to the preceding signs [in the Olivet Discourse], while the exhortation to the church [in Paul's teaching] is without this context, and the coming of the Lord is regarded as an imminent event." Walvoord continues: "In 1 Thessalonians 5:6, [the church is] exhorted to 'be alert [grēgoreō] and self-controlled, hardly a realistic command if the coming of Christ was greatly removed from their expectation." 10 Notice that Walvoord makes the faulty assumption that one cannot have expectation for an event if certain signs must happen before it. He is inconsistent, however, because the so-called tribulation saints in the Olivet Discourse are also exhorted to have expectation for an event that is not imminent.

Turning to the other instances of grēgoreō in the Gospels, Mark's account is parallel to Matthew's, so what I commented on above also applies to Mark's account (Mark 13:34-35, 37). Even though the Gospel of Luke possesses its own version of the Olivet Discourse in Luke 21, a key passage on watchfulness occurs in Luke 12:35-48.11 The instance of grēgoreō reads, "Blessed are those slaves whom their master finds alert [grēgoreō] when he returns! I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, have them take their place at the table, and will come and wait on them!" (Luke 12:37). Pretribulation interpreters point to the previous verse in Luke 12:36 as proof for an imminent rapture: "Be like people waiting for their master to come back from the wedding celebration, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately

open the door for him" (Luke 12:36). Jesus uses metaphoric wedding language to describe his return. Within this descriptive similitude, he mentions that his return will be signaled by a "knock" at the door: "so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him" (Luke 12:36). We will know he is behind the door because before he opens the door we will hear the "knock" so to speak. If the rapture is imminent, then why is a knock necessary before the door is opened? If the analogy is supposed to illustrate imminence, it would be more coherent to expect Jesus to open the door without first knocking.

Commenting on Matthew's Olivet Discourse, Robert L. Thomas claims, "These signals of nearness differ from the parables of Luke 12:35-48, which contained no signs of nearness. If signs must occur before His coming, His coming is not imminent. Neither are there signs given in Luke 17:26-37, where Jesus with several similar comparisons predicts the imminent coming of the Kingdom of God." 12 This is mistaken. First, Thomas makes the unwarranted assumption that if there are no signs mentioned in an eschatological passage then that passage must be referring to an imminent rapture. This is a classic case of argument from silence. Second, it is mistaken to think that Jesus and the New Testament writers must mention signs every time; otherwise, it must refer to a so-called imminent rapture. This is an absurd standard imposed on Jesus and other New Testament writers. It does not take into consideration the specific contextual purposes of Jesus and the other writers. For example, in Luke 12, no one is asking for the sign to Jesus's return. So why should Jesus feel compelled to address a question that was never asked of him? Third, Thomas fails to mention the parallel parables that immediately follow Matt 24:31. The eschatological parables in Luke 12 and 17 complement Jesus's teaching in Matt 24 developing a composite to Jesus's future coming.

Some further comments on the use of grēgoreō in the Lukan passage. The reason Jesus emphasizes being watchful is so believers do not find themselves unprepared when Jesus returns. Jesus warns of having the following mindset during the delayed Parousia: "I don't think

⁹ John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 75.

¹⁰ Walvoord, *Rapture Question*, 74.

¹¹ We should not assume that Jesus could teach about a topic only once during his ministry. Certainly, during the years of his earthly ministry, he would teach on the same topic multiple times. The Olivet Discourse is no exception. We have a sliver of what Jesus taught and did during his ministry (John 21:25). God selected which teachings and deeds were recorded for the benefit of his people.

¹² Robert L. Thomas, "Imminence in the NT, Especially Paul's Thessalonian Epistles," TMSJ 13/2 (2002): 193.

Jesus is coming back anytime soon, so I will live as I please now and change my life later." That foolish mindset will ensure that you will be unprepared and shut out of the kingdom: "Then the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not foresee, and will cut him in two, and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt 24:50-51). By "watchful," then, Jesus means spiritual vigilance. Jesus taught us not to become anxious about the cares of this world by trusting in his provisions and not trusting in one's own possessions on earth:

But be on your guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day close down upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will overtake all who live on the face of the whole earth. But stay alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that must happen, and to stand before the Son of Man. (Luke 21:34-36)

This exhortation dovetails into Luke 12:36 where the person is to "wait" for their master's return, trusting God for provisions while they wait. This person will be "blessed" because Jesus will find them "alert [grēgoreō] when he returns!" (v. 37). Jesus teaches that he can return during any generation of the church, not at any moment. Within that particular generation, believers must always be spiritually prepared, lest Jesus return during a season where they lack vigilance: "You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect [dokeo] him" (Luke 12:40). The Greek verb behind the English "expect" is dokeo. The term carries the sense of "consider as probable" 13—i.e. Jesus warns then against the attitude of thinking that it is not probable that he will return at the present stage in one's life. The remedy for complacency, Jesus says, is working: "Blessed is that slave whom his master finds at work when he returns" (Luke 12:43). Of course, Jesus, in this entire context, is referring to kingdom work, living for the world to come rather than this world. In short, "watchfulness"

¹³ BDAG, NA.

means faithfulness, and thus, "the Lord's delay brought out the true character of his servants." 14 When the cluster of prophetic conditions and events begins to happen just before Jesus returns, each will occur in domino fashion. So rapidly will they unfold that the professing—not possessing—Christian who is not prepared will suffer the consequences:

But if that slave should say to himself, 'My master is delayed in returning,' and he begins to beat the other slaves, both men and women, and to eat, drink, and get drunk, then the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not foresee, and will cut him in two, and assign him a place with the unfaithful. (Luke 12:45-46)

A motivating factor for faithfulness to Jesus is understanding there is a delay in his return, not imminence. Perseverance during the delay will be the touchstone for those who will be faithful and those who will not. The person who becomes spiritually lax does so not because they failed to think about an any-moment rapture. They have lapsed because they have not endured the delay of Jesus's Parousia. 15 Jesus's message is distorted when imminence theology is read into Jesus's words in Luke. George Eldon Ladd rightly agrees with this understanding of the Lukan passage: "The reason for the exhortation to watch is not so much that Christ may come at any moment as it is that He may not come for some time. The central problem is the delay of the parousia." ¹⁶ He continues to explain:

The use of the word "looking for" does not carry with it the necessary idea of an any-moment event, although it does connote a complex of events which might begin at any time [beginning with the signing of a covenant]. We may discover the meaning of the word from its uses elsewhere. Simeon was a righteous and devout man who was "looking for the consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25). Joseph of Arimathea was "looking for the

¹⁴ Cf. George Eldon Ladd, The Blessed Hope: A Biblical Study on the Second Advent and the Rapture (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 117.

¹⁵ Ladd, Blessed Hope, 117.

¹⁶ Ladd, Blessed Hope, 116.

kingdom of God" (Luke 23:51). Both of these pious Jews were living in constant expectation of a complex of events which include the appearing of Messiah, the overthrow of the enemies of God, and the inauguration of the kingdom of God—events which we now know include the totality of all that is involved in both advents of Christ. 17

In short, the Lukan passage is not addressing the intervening events before Jesus's return—it is about how to live while one waits for his return. Jesus is instilling expectancy into his disciples. The warnings to watch have been relevant for every generation of the church. Jesus could have returned during any generation because God could have orchestrated the events as such to be fulfilled.

Instances of Gregoreo in Paul's Letters and the Book of Revelation

We now turn to the instances of *grēgoreō* in Paul's letters and the book of Revelation. First, turning to Paul's Thessalonian instances:

1 Thess 5:6 So then we must not sleep as the rest, but must stay alert [grēgoreō] and sober.

1 Thess 5:10 He died for us so that whether we are alert [grēgoreō] or asleep we will come to life together with him.

In arguing for imminence, Paul D. Feinberg uses Paul's first instance of grēgoreō in 1 Thess 5:6 as support: "While 1 Thessalonians 5:6 does exhort the believer to watch, there is no object for the verb."18 There are problems with this understanding. First, he thinks that Paul is speaking of watching in the physical sense. Paul, instead, is using it in a spiritual sense when he uses the term in connection with "sleeping" and being "sober." Second, even if Paul used it in a physical sense, Feinberg assumes—and never argues for that to exhort someone to watch must require that an event is imminent. Why would the apostle Paul be under an obligation to outline signs every time he discusses the second coming? Why can he not simply give a general exhortation to be alert? Feinberg never explains this demand on Paul or the other writers. He



simply assumes that if a passage relates to the return of Christ without mentioning signs, then it must refer to an any-moment rapture. Not to mention, the apostle Paul had just stated that he was not going to talk about events that will occur before the Lord's return, presumably because he already taught this when he planted the church: "Now on the topic of times and seasons, brothers and sisters, you have no need for anything to be written to you" (1 Thess 5:1). Incidentally, in 1 Thess 4:15, 17, Paul gives a prophecy of a great persecution of the church leading up to the Parousia by employing the term perileipomenoi, which carries the sense of surviving where other people have died.19

For we tell you this by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive [perileipomenoi], who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not go ahead of those who have fallen asleep. . . . Then we who are alive [perileipomenoi], who are left, will be suddenly caught up together with them in the

¹⁷ Ladd, Blessed Hope, 116.

¹⁸ Feinberg, "Response: Paul D. Feinberg," 154.

¹⁹ BDAG, LN



clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. (1 Thess 4:15, 17)

Renald Showers confuses Paul's meaning when he comments on Paul's use of grēgoreō: "Church saints are to be continuously alert or on the watch for Christ to come, because the reality of God's plan and purpose for history and, therefore, for them and their future indicates that He could come at any moment" (emphasis mine).20 Showers merely asserts that this refers to imminence and never attempts to support his claim. Gerald B. Stanton also understands Paul's exhortation to the churches at both Thessalonica and Sardis to watch for an any-moment rapture. He says that the hope of the church "consists of the apostolic exhortations to look, watch, wait, and be ready for the coming of the Saviour. Herein lies additional positive and Scriptural proof for the imminency of His return" (emphasis his).21 What exegetical basis is there to make grēgoreō refer to imminence if an author does not mention signs before Jesus's return for the church? This deep-seated assumption by pretribulationists is circular reasoning, beginning with this pre-conceived conclusion.

I need to comment more on how Paul uses grēgoreō in 1 Thess 5. After his rapture passage in 1 Thess 4, Paul continues to discuss the topic of Jesus's return, but he shifts to its consequences for unbelievers when the day of the Lord will come upon them as "sudden destruction" (1 Thess 5:3). Within this foreboding reality for the wicked, Paul warns believers that if they are not spiritually prepared, they will experience this same fate. Here is the immediate context of Paul's first instance of grēgoreō:

(5) For you all are sons of the light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of the darkness. (6) So then we must not sleep as the rest, but must stay alert [grēgoreō] and sober. (7) For those who sleep, sleep at night and those who get drunk are drunk at night. (8) But since we are of the day, we must stay sober by putting on the breastplate of faith and love and as a helmet our hope for salvation. (1 Thess 5:5-8)

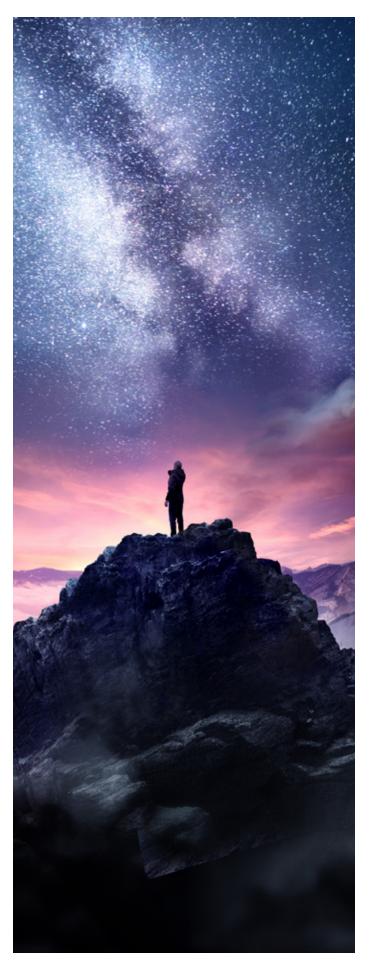
In this context, grēgoreō is a spiritual or moral watching/alertness, not a physical "looking for" an object. Paul elaborates on the contrast between two moral natures. Verse 5 gives the reason: believers are sons of light and day. The metaphor light-day refers to being part of the people of God. The reference alludes to Jesus's words: "While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become sons of light" (John 12:36). But belonging to God is not merely static, because Paul explains the moral implications of possessing this relationship with God. A child of God cannot belong to both the day and the night, so he again emphasizes that they are "not of the night nor of the darkness."

In verse 6, Paul explains to the Thessalonians what it means to belong to God. First, they must not sleep. The term "sleep" is metaphorical, characterizing the lack of spiritual life of the unregenerate,

²⁰ Showers, Maranatha, 203.

²¹ Stanton, *Kept from the Hour*, 127.

A Commentary on the Book of Revelation revelationcommentary.com



just as "the rest" refers to their pagan neighbors (cf. 1 Thess 4:13). Thus, he exhorts believers to live in the light of their God-given nature by staying spiritually "alert [grēgoreō] and sober" and avoiding ethical lethargy. This vigilant and self-controlled posture will be imperative as the Lord's coming nears because it serves a vital purpose. During the Antichrist's great tribulation, this readiness will be essential to overcoming the temptations of persecution, false teachings, and slothfulness, so that the believer may embrace the Lord at his coming blamelessly instead of in shame. In contrast to the light-day nature of believers, Paul gives an additional description of the posture of unbelievers: "Those who sleep, sleep at night and those who get drunk are drunk at night" (1 Thess 5:7; cf. Luke 21:34). Paul may be using the term "drunk" as a synecdoche, which is a figure of speech in which a part is used to refer to the whole or vice versa. Paul refers to the sin of being literally drunk, but he likely is also referring to the whole complex of vices associated with drunkenness in the mind of the ancient person—laziness, adultery, coarse joking, greed, and so on. In antiquity, these were principally "night sins." Certainly, today we can add to this list the idolatry of entertainment and sports in our culture, as well as addiction to the internet, social media, and any other diversions that keep the Christian soul busy and distracted from kingdom work.

In verse 8, the apostle emphatically contrasts unbelievers with believers, reminding them that they are of the day and thus to maintain soberness. How is this to be accomplished? He exhorts them to practice the three-corded rope that he couches in the military imagery of "putting on the breastplate of faith and love and as a helmet our hope for salvation." The implication is that if we stumble in these three Christian virtues, there is the danger of losing our soberness. The "hope of salvation" most likely refers not to our salvation in the general sense, but to deliverance from the coming day of the Lord's wrath mentioned immediately after verse 8: "For God did not destine us for wrath but for gaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess 5:9). Therefore, the closer we approach the Lord's coming, the more the devil will throw in our daily path

distractions and temptations to deflect our attention from our Parousia-watchfulness (grēgoreō). Let us consider well the apostle's warning. We can approach that day in confidence if we cling to biblical faith, love, and hope. Paul shifts from the difference between the character of believers and unbelievers to the destiny of believers. The sanctifying exhortations in verse 8 are grounded in the truth of verse 9, teaching that God does not destine Christians for wrath. Throughout Paul's two Thessalonian letters, he stresses the sovereignty of God in salvation. God's purposes are foremost, expressed through his loving act of not destining his redeemed people unto wrath tribulation and trials, yes, but not divine wrath. The reason Paul says we can have confidence in our salvation is because God has "not destined us to wrath." In this context, Paul is not speaking of eternal wrath, but the temporal wrath that will be poured upon the ungodly at Christ's return.

This leads us to Paul's second and final usage of the term: "He died for us so that whether we are alert [grēgoreō] or asleep we will come to life together with him" (1 Thess 5:10). We are told that the purpose for Christ's death is so we would be "together with him." God seeks to dwell with his people. Paul reiterates the comforting truth of the believer's state, "Whether we are alert or asleep we will come to life together with him" (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13-18). In this verse, "alert" (grēgoreō), unlike the other eschatological instances of the term, takes on the sense of being physically "alive." This sense harkens back to Paul's earlier statement about those who are found "alive" at Jesus's Parousia (1 Thess 4:15). Finally, in verse 11, there is a restatement of the same exhortation from the previous section: "Therefore encourage one another" (cf. 1 Thess 4:18).

In summary of Paul's instances of grēgoreō, the contexts do not relate to the physical sense "to look for" an object; instead, Paul's first usage, in verse 6, indicates a spiritual alertness, which should be in accordance to their state as believers in Christ. The second usage, in verse 10, has the sense of physically being alive, which alludes back to Paul's earlier exposition of those who are alive and have survived up to the Parousia. First Thessalonians 5:1-11 is not teaching that we need to be ready and alert because the day of the Lord is imminent. Rather, Paul is reassuring them that they will not experience the day of the Lord's wrath. They need to be watchful and ready because the reassurance is grounded in their ordained redemptive status as God's people (1 Thess 5:4-5, 8-10).²² Further, pretribulation interpreters have wrongly assumed that Paul's first usage of watchfulness/ alertness in verse 6 implies imminence. Paul states that it was not his purpose to discuss the conditions of Jesus's return (1 Thess 5:1). Paul's purpose for writing this passage was to reassure the Thessalonians who were feeling trepidation that they might experience the day of the Lord's wrath. Moreover, Paul would write a second Thessalonian epistle for the very purpose of explaining that two significant events must happen before Jesus's return (2 Thess 2:1-4). Since discussing the events surrounding Jesus's return was not his main purpose in his first epistle, pretribulation interpreters are mistaken for reading their imminence theology into what Paul is not addressing. The first principle of biblical interpretation is to ask, not what the interpreter thinks the author should have said, or should not have said, but what the author intended to

Finally, we turn to the last three instances in the book of Revelation.

Rev 3:2 Wake up [grēgoreō] then, and strengthen what remains that was about to die, because I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.

Rev 3:3 Therefore, remember what you received and heard, and obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up [grēgoreō], I will come like a thief, and you will never know at what hour I will come against you.

Rev 16:15 (Look! I will come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays alert [grēgoreō] and does not lose his clothes so that he will not have to walk

²² For more on Paul's main purpose in 1 Thess 5:1–11, see Colin R. Nicholl, From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica: Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 126 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 67-79.



around naked and his shameful condition be seen.)

Of the seven churches in the book of Revelation, the church in Sardis is typically known as the "dead" church. But it should be conceived as a church that is only near dead as it is admonished to "strengthen what remains." The church was not pleasing in the "sight of my God," so they are warned to "wake up" from their lethargy and obey God and repent of their sins before it is too late. The usage of *grēgoreō* in these verses refers to spiritual watchfulness and not a physical "looking for" an object. Likewise, the last biblical instance of grēgoreō found in Rev 16:15 carries this same sense of spiritual vigilance, lest the unprepared person would "lose his clothes so that he will not have to walk around naked and his shameful condition be seen." These instances in the book of Revelation are used, then, similarly to the other instances in the New Testament concerning eschatology—spiritual watchfulness.

We have established that the activity of watching and the contexts that grēgoreō are used within do not refer to an imminent return. When the biblical authors invoked this term, they intended to convey spiritual watchfulness during the delay of the Lord's return not an imminent return. They did not use the term

in the sense of looking up in the sky and watching for an any-moment rapture. Nor did Jesus intend the term to mean imminence in the context of spiritually watching. Instead, he taught us to "watch" by being spiritually vigilant. Persecution and other trials will create temptations to give up, apostatize, and become distracted from our yearning for the Lord's return.²³

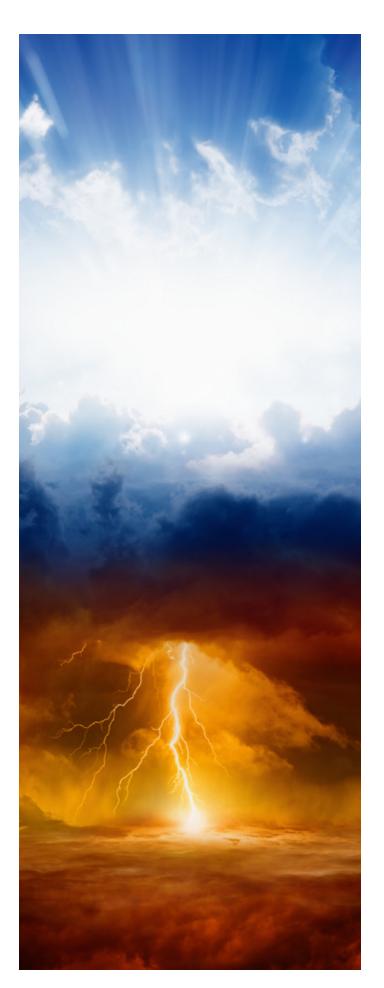
Physical Watchfulness

I want to conclude this article with some comments on the physical sense of watching for our Lord's return. As I mentioned in the beginning of this article, grēgoreō can refer to watching in a physical sense in other contexts than eschatological. But in our context of biblical prophecy, the authors consistently used it in the sense of spiritual vigilance for the purpose of guarding one's mind and soul while waiting till Jesus's coming. When the biblical authors exhorted their readers to watch for the signs and events that will signal Jesus's coming, they encouraged them to endure to the end.

²³ Incidentally, a synonym of *grēgoreō* is *agrypneō*, which also captures the sense of spiritual watchfulness: "Vigilant in awareness of threatening peril, be alert." The term in Mark 13:33 and Luke 21:36, for example, is used to depict events that must happen before Jesus's return.

When we see the signs, they should embolden us that our Lord is near. Recognizing these signs will give us confidence within the turmoil to stay strong to the end. The pretribulationist misses the point of these signs when they object by saying, for example, "Are we to wait for signs and not for the Lord himself?" S. P. Tregelles replies to this objection: "But what does such a question mean? If the Lord has told us to wait, it is thus that we should watch. To despise the sign is to despise the Word of the Lord who has promised it; it is to refuse submission to His authority" (emphasis his).²⁴ Tregelles's response brings up an important point. Discerning signs and being spiritually watchful are not disconnected from each other—they complement each other. When the church goes under persecution during the Antichrist's great tribulation, the signs will signal to the church that the Lord's return is near, while the exhortations to the church to be spiritually watchful serve to remind us that there will be the danger of becoming apathetic and distracted during that turmoil. When these end-time events occur, Christ teaches that they will be discernable, marking the season of Jesus's impending return; for example: "So when you see [idēte] the abomination of desolation" (Matt 24:15); "Learn this parable from the fig tree: Whenever its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also you, when you see [idēte] all these things, know that he is near, right at the door" (Matt 24:32-33); "So also you, when you see [idēte] these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near" (Luke 21:31); "But when these things begin to happen, stand up and raise your heads [i.e. look up], because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28).

Eschatological signs should invigorate watchfulness in the hope of Christ's return. The value of signs then should "lead on the thoughts and affections to Him for whom the church is called to watch and wait, and who has Himself promised these signs to His expecting people." 25 Many Christians know that Jesus is returning and are only satisfied by that fact. Not only



²⁴ S. P. Tregelles, The Hope of Christ's Second Coming: How Is it Taught in Scripture? And Why? (London: Houlston & Wright,

²⁵ Tregelles, Hope of Christ's Second Coming, 59.

is this very different from biblical watchfulness, but such a disposition dangerously allows the "delay" to result in slothfulness:

Get dressed for service and keep your lamps burning; be like people waiting for their master to come back from the wedding celebration, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. Blessed are those slaves whom their master finds alert when he returns! I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, have them take their place at the table, and will come and wait on them! Even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night and finds them alert, blessed are those slaves! But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. Luke 12:35-40 (emphasis mine)

Conclusion

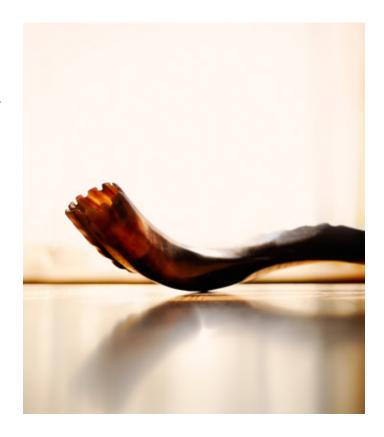
In conclusion, spiritual watching has the goal of faithfulness, while physical watching has the hope of fulfillment. Both activities work together to constitute biblical watchfulness. Various biblical passages emphasize one aspect or another, so it is important to recognize what is being stressed in a particular context. Watching, then, is not either/or. It involves two simultaneous types of watching: (1) the church is exhorted to spiritually watch during the delay of Jesus's return and not become apathetic as the five foolish virgins, and (2) the church is exhorted to physically watch for the Antichrist's great tribulation and the glorious sign that will eventually cut it short with Jesus's return. Construing watching as imminence consequently turns the activity of watching on its head.

When pretribulationists use psychological objections, such as claiming that a believer would "lose hope" if he or she must watch for intervening events before Jesus's return, they fail to recognize this proper two-fold aspect of watchfulness. I can look forward to the blessed time when the spring flowers bloom, but before that happens the snow must first melt—in fact, waiting for the snow to melt causes me to want to see the flowers all the more. During pregnancy, a soon-to-be mother anticipates seeing her baby being born, but she knows that she must first experience the pangs of childbearing, unless she expects a stork to imminently come along! The fact that she knows that the birth of her child is not imminent does not diminish her hope but heightens it! Watching for Jesus's coming while understanding that intervening events will happen first should increase our anticipation of the hope of seeing our Lord face-to-face. If someone insists that our hope diminishes under such conditions, then they have an issue with the authority of Jesus's teachings that we are to watch and endure during the intervening events. The hope we possess, as we watch, is joining our Lord at his return. Remain faithful. Be watchful.

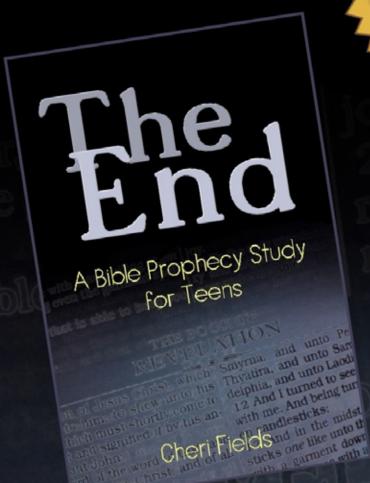


Alan E. Kurschner, Ph.D., is a biblical scholar committed to proclaiming the good news of God's salvation in this dark world and heralding the second coming of his Son, Jesus Christ. Dr. Kurschner is the

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™.



"Remember, many of these are things seminary professors, pastors, and authors have trouble with. But the Bible is as much for you as it is for them—grab its truth!"



Available at
Amazon
Barnes & Noble
and, by request,
your library

Not just for teenagers but also anyone looking for an accessible introduction to prophetic studies.



From Michigan:

As a homeschooling family, my parents took our biblical education seriously, but, without the wealth of studies available today, this mostly meant just reading the Bible chapter by chapter.

A while after we had settled into reading the Psalms and Proverbs daily, my mom ran across the promise in Revelation 1:3 that those who read it would be blessed. She wanted that blessing for us! So, before we were released to the rest of our activities, every school day opened with a chapter of Revelation. Of course, this only covered the first twenty-two days the month, so we added in Daniel for fun.

We did this for years. What I later realized was how great a blessing it had been to me that we didn't really talk about that passage much. My personal Bible had no notes at all, and Mom never ventured to discuss what she thought things meant. We took the warning at the end to not add to the Scriptures seriously!

As I moved through my teen years this left me as a kind of mushy post-tribulationist, after all, you wouldn't know there was even a rapture from just reading Revelation and Daniel. The churches we attended either never talked about prophecy or believed the Rapture could happen "any minute" — even while the preacher was still talking — but they more assumed this than taught it. So, I used to think about how I would want to move up to the Canadian Shield to avoid the burning heat of the fourth bowl judgment.

When I was twenty-one, I decided to study more of what the Bible had to say about the future. I had run into pretribulational arguments from time to time and found them unconvincing, but I had no desire to go through a hard time before reaching heaven. Most of all I wanted to know the truth. My family owned a copy of the Revelation Record by the father of the modern creationist movement, Henry Morris, so I decided to see if he could answer my concerns.

I did find him a careful, verse by verse expositor. He had staked his reputation on the truth of the Bible's beginning. I expected him to take the plain reading of the end no matter what others thought. It was surprising to me how little he actually presented as he interpreted things through his pretrib lens. The way he handled that doctrine was unlike the way he handled everything else. He believed in a literal rebuilt Babylon in Iraq. He believed in a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ. But when it came to the Rapture, he had exactly one verse, Revelation 3:10.

For several years this was enough for me to know, whatever the truth was, it didn't seem to be the pretrib position, but I barely knew there were any other interpretations, and this was the late 90s. Finally, it was time for me to join a small Independent Fundamental Baptist church I had been helping at for several years. I was fine with everything on their statement of faith except that it included the timing of the Rapture right there alongside things like baptism and the Trinity. I had to know what I believed for myself.

This time, I didn't start with Revelation. I could half-quote most of it already and knew it didn't spell this issue out. So, I went to Jesus's teaching in Matthew 24. It only took a matter of minutes to realize his string of events starting with the sun, moon, and stars being darkened and ending with the Rapture did line up with something in Revelation. Sure enough, when I applied Jesus's timeline to what John saw, there it was!

I started to call myself a "Revelation 7 Rapturist." My church was nice enough to allow me an exemption to the timing of the Rapture (only later would I realize this is too often not the case), and I moved on to other areas of study. What troubled me was the thought that I was seeing something unique. This isn't something that should happen in orthodoxy. There is nothing new in God's Word; if it's really there, others will have found it too.

Finally, in 2005 a friend gave my husband and me his copy of The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church by Marvin Rosenthal. It was exciting not only to learn more about what he and Van Kampen had studied but especially to realize what I had seen was there for others to recognize as well. It was a wrench to have to study more deeply just how horrific the circumstances leading up to the Rapture would have to be, but that was never what mattered most to me.

I had found the truth and a community of believers who took God's Word first no matter how counter it might be to our traditions.

— Cheri

From California:

All I knew about the rapture of the church was that my newly-saved soul grieved that any saint would be left behind.

Not just missing out on the exceedingly beautiful, outrageously powerful rapture of the Bride, but left behind to suffer grievously, while I what? Hung out in heaven? Does the Perfect and Holy God send His Son secretly half way to earth for a self-indulgent Bride? Not to say, that the saints in persecuted places of the earth were this way at all, but I am in prosperous SoCal.

Therefore, I started studying the Word to understand the pre-tribulation view and listening to sound pastors and teachers expound on the rapture. However, nothing seemed to fit. Ten years passed. Then a friend gave me a copy of Marvin J. Rosenthal's book titled The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church. Wow, how this resonated with my spirit. But sadly, eight more years pass before I picked up the book again. In doing so, I found that the scriptures that denote the return of Christ and the Pre-wrath rapture of the church totally made sense. It was like the moving of a rapid river of truth, which gives light to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is no small thing. In fact, I am convinced that the pre-tribulation rapture deception deeply cuts a chunk out of the sovereignty and glory of our God. He gave us His promise that He is able to keep us from stumbling and present us holy and blameless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy! Our hope in perilous times.

Although I am often overwhelmed by the grand scale of the end-time events—this I know. I have been granted to suffer with my Lord, and to know His love with ALL the Saints. When I hear someone quote Matthew 24:36 which says, "... concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son," usually heard as an excuse for holding on to the pre-tribulation belief—to pop out of here without a moment's notice and not have to experience the suffering. My response—"I am a child of the light not of the darkness, and the Lord makes it clear that I can know and should know the season of His return." I thank Alan Kurschner for his diligent and exhaustive work in presenting the pre-wrath view in which every Scripture of hope and victory—Old Testament and New Testament—strengthens the faithful to walk pleasing to our God, as we look for Jesus' return. Maranatha.

— Suzan 📴



P.O. Box 747 Rice Lake, WI 54868

SEVEN PRETRIB PROBLEMS AND THE PREWRATH RAPTURE

Co-produced by

Alan Kurschner & Chris White

This new documentary, Seven Pretrib Problems and the Prewrath Rapture, identifies seven flaws in pretribulation rapture theology. Identifying the problems does not stop there as this documentary responds compellingly to these pretrib problems with seven prewrath answers. This documentary marshals leading biblical prophecy teachers who walk through each of the seven problems, answering them with sound biblical investigation!

TEACHERS INCLUDE:

Alan Kurschner, Alan Hultberg, Charles Cooper, David Rosenthal, Ryan Habbena

Visit the Documentary website:

7pretribproblems.com

While we offer free viewing of this documentary on YouTube, you can purchase the documentary bundled as a DVD and USB Flash Drive.

Order now! alankurschner.com/dvd

