

The Rapture and the Parousia

Where the “Rapture” came from, what the early church taught, and what Paul meant when he wrote “we will meet the Lord in the air”

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← Discipleship School

Where this fits: Lesson 1 of the Pleasant Springs *End Times* series. In this first lesson we lay the foundation — tracing the modern “Rapture” doctrine back to its 19th-century Irish origin, surveying what the early Church actually believed, studying the three Greek words on which the whole discussion turns (*parousia*, *apantêsis*, *harpazô*), and letting the original audiences of 1 Thessalonians 4 and Matthew 24 tell us how they would have heard these texts. Later lessons will go deeper into Revelation, the millennium, and the pastoral shape of Christian hope.

WHY THIS LESSON MATTERS

Most American Christians in the last seventy-five years have grown up on a story that goes roughly like this: One day, probably any day now, Jesus will quietly return above the clouds. In a split second the bodies of every true believer will disappear — cars left crashing with empty driver’s seats, planes plummeting without pilots, children vanishing from their beds. This secret coming is called the **Rapture**. Those left behind will face seven years of unprecedented tribulation under an Antichrist who rises out of the revived Roman Empire. Then, at the end of that tribulation, Jesus will come back publicly, defeat evil at Armageddon, and set up a thousand-year kingdom.

This narrative has come to most Americans through the Scofield Reference Bible (1909), Dallas Theological Seminary (founded 1924), Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), and Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins’s *Left Behind* novels (1995–2007). It has been preached from thousands of pulpits, animated in films, woven into worship choruses. It feels, to many believers, like “just what the Bible teaches.”

It is not. Pleasant Springs Church loves its brothers and sisters in every tradition, but we teach you the truth: the *pretribulational Rapture* doctrine was not part of the Christian faith before about 1830. It was never taught by any Apostle, any Church Father, any Reformer, any Puritan, or any Christian leader prior to John Nelson Darby in Ireland in the late 1820s. In this lesson we trace where the teaching actually came from, what the early Church believed instead, and what the Greek New Testament genuinely says.

We draw on Matthew L. Halsted’s *The End of the World as We Know It* (IVP, 2023) as a primary modern resource. Halsted, a New Testament scholar trained in the dispensational tradition who came to reject it by close exegetical work, shows clearly what the text actually says when read on its own terms. Where we cite him, we are citing a scholar who has done the homework.

Greek NT (1 Thess 4:17): ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἁρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἀέρα.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 (ESV): “Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds **to meet the Lord** in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”

PART 1 — THE ORIGIN OF THE RAPTURE DOCTRINE (1827–1909)

If the pretribulational Rapture doctrine is as central as modern American evangelicalism makes it out to be, one would expect to find it in the New Testament, in the Apostolic Fathers, in Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Edwards, Spurgeon. One finds it in none of them. The doctrine has a datable origin, a named creator, and a clear trajectory from its invention in the 1820s to its American ubiquity in the 20th century.

John Nelson Darby (1800–1882)

BORN WESTMINSTER, LONDON • EDUCATED WESTMINSTER SCHOOL AND TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN • ORDAINED CHURCH OF IRELAND PRIEST 1826 • LEFT THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH 1827 • LEADER OF THE PLYMOUTH (EXCLUSIVE) BRETHREN 1830–1882 • DIED BOURNEMOUTH, ENGLAND

Father of Dispensationalism

Inventor of the Rapture

Darby is the single most important figure in the history of modern rapture teaching, and almost no one in an American evangelical pew has heard of him. He was a brilliant, abrasive, legally trained Irish Anglican priest who became disillusioned with the Established Church after an 1827 horseback riding accident left him injured and introspective for months. During that convalescence, and in the years immediately following, he began developing a new way of reading the Bible that he called *dispensationalism*.

Dispensationalism makes two radical moves. First, it divides biblical history into seven distinct *dispensations* (Innocence, Conscience, Government, Promise, Law, Grace, Kingdom), in each of which God deals with humanity in a fundamentally different way. Second, and more consequential, it makes a sharp distinction between **Israel** (God’s earthly people with earthly promises) and **the Church** (God’s heavenly people with heavenly promises). From this Israel/Church split flows everything else — the need for a separate earthly kingdom for Israel in the future millennium, the need for the Church to be removed from the earth before God resumes his earthly program with Israel, and therefore the need for a *secret pretribulational Rapture* to get the Church out of the way before the “Seventieth Week of Daniel” begins.

Darby worked out these ideas between 1827 and 1830 and refined them at a series of gatherings held at Lady Powerscourt’s estate in County Wicklow, Ireland (the **Powerscourt Conferences**, 1831–1833). He published his eschatology most clearly in *The Hopes of the Church of God* (1840) and disseminated the whole system through the growing international network of Plymouth Brethren assemblies. He made six preaching tours of the United States and Canada between 1859 and 1874, laying the groundwork on which Scofield would soon build.

A strange backstory: Margaret MacDonald (c. 1815–1840). In the spring of 1830 in Port Glasgow, Scotland, a teenage girl named Margaret MacDonald experienced what she and her

circle called a prophetic vision or utterance. Her handwritten account, preserved and published by the Edward Irving Catholic Apostolic circle, describes “the fiery trial which is to try us” and speaks of believers being “caught up” to meet the Lord. The historian **Dave MacPherson**, in his 1973 book *The Incredible Cover-Up* and follow-up works, argued that Darby visited MacDonald in 1830 and borrowed his secret-rapture idea from her — a claim dispensationalists (especially John Walvoord) have strenuously denied. The MacPherson thesis cannot be proved with certainty, but what is certain is that before 1830 nobody taught this doctrine, and by 1831 Darby was teaching it publicly.

Edward Irving (1792–1834) — a parallel development

SCOTTISH PRESBYTERIAN PASTOR • REGENT SQUARE CHURCH, LONDON 1822–1832 • FOUNDER OF THE CATHOLIC APOSTOLIC CHURCH

Prophetic Conferences

Parallel origin

In the same years, the Scottish Presbyterian Edward Irving, pastor of the fashionable Regent Square church in London, hosted what were called the Albury Park conferences (1826–1828, on the estate of Henry Drummond) and developed his own proto-dispensational, futurist eschatology. Irving promoted “the restoration of the apostolic gifts” (early charismatic worship) and a pretribulational coming of Christ. His movement split off into the Catholic Apostolic Church. Irving was defrocked by the Church of Scotland in 1833 and died the next year at 42. The confluence of Darby in Ireland, Irving in London, and MacDonald in Scotland between 1826 and 1833 is the narrow window in which the modern Rapture doctrine was born.

Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843–1921) — the man who made Darby mainstream

BORN LENAWEE COUNTY, MICHIGAN • CONFEDERATE VETERAN, THEN KANSAS POLITICIAN AND LAWYER • CONVERTED 1879 • CONGREGATIONALIST PASTOR DALLAS, TEXAS 1882–1895 • *SCOFIELD REFERENCE BIBLE* PUBLISHED BY OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 1909

Scofield Bible 1909

Popularizer

Scofield was a lawyer of dubious reputation (a messy divorce, a forgery conviction) who underwent a dramatic conversion in 1879 and entered pastoral ministry. He was discipled in dispensationalism by James H. Brookes, the Presbyterian pastor of Walnut Street Church in St. Louis and the chief American popularizer of Darby's system. Scofield's great project was a study Bible — a Bible with extensive footnotes, headings, cross-references, and introductions written by himself, presenting the entire text through a thoroughgoing dispensational lens. Oxford University Press published the **Scofield Reference Bible** in 1909 and a revised edition in 1917.

For the ordinary American Protestant who bought a Scofield Bible, the dispensational scheme did not appear to be Scofield's footnotes; it appeared to be *what the Bible said*. The footnote and the text sat on the same page in the same elegant Oxford typeface, and millions of readers, preachers, and Sunday-school teachers absorbed Darby's 1830 system as biblical Christianity. The Scofield Bible sold more than 10 million copies in its first fifty years.

Dallas Theological Seminary (founded 1924). Lewis Sperry Chafer, a Scofield disciple, founded Dallas Theological Seminary in 1924 explicitly to produce pastors trained in the Scofield-Darby system. Dallas became the intellectual engine of American dispensationalism for the 20th century: Chafer, John F. Walvoord, Charles C. Ryrie, J. Dwight Pentecost, Dwight Pentecost, Hal Lindsey, Chuck Swindoll, Tony Evans, Tim LaHaye, David Jeremiah — almost every major American evangelical voice on prophecy in the last 100 years studied there.

Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) brought the dispensational system to the mass market; it sold more than 35 million copies and was the #1 best-selling non-fiction book of the 1970s in the United States. Lindsey claimed a generation of forty years from the 1948 re-founding of Israel (he was very careful never to set a hard date, but his readers did). **Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins's *Left Behind* series** (12 novels, 1995–2004, plus several prequels) sold over 80 million copies and made the dispensational Rapture the dominant imaginative framework of American Christian eschatology in the 21st century.

A pastoral observation. We are not saying dispensationalists are wicked or dishonest people. We are saying this: a doctrine that emerged in 1830 in Ireland and Scotland, that no Christian in the world had taught for the previous 1,800 years, is almost certainly not the plain teaching of the New

Testament. When something “no one ever saw before” is suddenly “obvious,” the burden of proof is on the innovator, not on the historic faith.

PART 2 — WHAT THE EARLY CHURCH ACTUALLY TAUGHT (AD 90–400)

The ancient Church did not teach a secret pretribulational rapture. What it did teach was that Christ would return, that his people would pass through a period of terrible tribulation under Antichrist, and that the Lord himself would then deliver them at his *parousia*. Here are the voices.

The Didache (c. 90–110 AD)

THE OLDEST SURVIVING NON-CANONICAL CHRISTIAN DOCUMENT, PERHAPS OLDER THAN SOME NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

The Didache’s final chapter (16) describes the last days: “In the last days false prophets and corrupters will multiply... and the sheep will turn into wolves, and love will turn into hate... Then the world-deceiver will appear as a son of God, and he will do signs and wonders... and the **test of fire** will come, and many will stumble and perish; but those who endure in their faith will be saved by the Curse himself. And then the signs of the truth will appear: first the sign of an opening in heaven, then the sign of the sound of the trumpet, and third the resurrection of the dead — *but not of all*, as it has been said: **‘The Lord will come, and all his saints with him.’**” (Didache 16). The Church is in the tribulation, endures through it, and is saved at Christ’s one singular coming. No rapture before; deliverance through. This is the Apostolic Fathers’ view.

Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 130 – c. 202)

AGAINST HERESIES, BOOKS IV–V

“And therefore, when in the end the Church shall be suddenly caught up from this, it is said, ‘There shall be tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, neither shall be.’ *For this is the last contest of the righteous, in which, when they overcome, they are*

crowned with incorruption.” (Against Heresies V.29). Irenaeus explicitly places the Church **inside** the great tribulation, being crowned only at its end. Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John. He is as close to the apostolic source as any uninspired writer we have, and he knows nothing of a pre-tribulational rescue.

Tertullian of Carthage (c. 155 – c. 220)

ON THE RESURRECTION OF THE FLESH, AGAINST MARCION, SCORPIACE

Tertullian writes of the suffering church as participating in Christ’s passion through its own martyrdom, and of the glorified church as ruling with Christ on a renewed earth after his singular *adventus* (Latin for *parousia*). His treatise *Scorpiace* (“Antidote to the Sting of the Scorpion”) argues that Christians should embrace martyrdom rather than flee it, because the same glorious reward awaits all the faithful *after* they have endured. No rapture as an exit ramp. In Tertullian’s theology the Church suffers and is vindicated in the same event.

Hippolytus of Rome (c. 170 – c. 235)

TREATISE ON CHRIST AND ANTICHRIST, COMMENTARY ON DANIEL

Hippolytus writes the earliest surviving detailed Christian treatment of Antichrist, drawing heavily on Daniel and Revelation. The Church goes through the 3½-year reign of Antichrist. Christ returns and defeats Antichrist. There is no preliminary snatching away of the saints.

Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 313–386)

CATECHETICAL LECTURES 15 (“ON THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST”)

“We preach not one coming of Christ, but a second also, far more glorious than the first... We shall see the sign of the cross appearing in the heavens... and the trumpet shall sound, and we shall be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” Cyril, catechizing his

candidates for Easter baptism, teaches *one* Second Coming. The catching up is how the Church meets the returning King.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430)

CITY OF GOD, BOOK XX

Augustine rejected the older premillennialism of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian, arguing instead that the “thousand years” of Revelation 20 symbolizes the entire age of the Church between Christ’s resurrection and his return. This amillennial view became the standard position of the Western Church for the next thousand years. Augustine’s Christ returns *once*, publicly and gloriously, to judge the living and the dead. Again, no pretribulational rapture.

The early Church’s consensus: Christ will return once, publicly, gloriously. His people may suffer severely before that return — they are already suffering under Rome — but there is no preliminary snatching-away that excuses them from the trouble. The coming, resurrection, judgment, and new creation are a single eschatological event, not a sequence of two comings separated by seven years.

PART 3 — THE SEVEN POSITIONS COMPARED

To help you recognize these views when you encounter them, here are the seven major positions — four on rapture timing, three on the millennium — with their proponents and the Scriptures each claims.

INVENTED 1830 • MODERN

1. Pretribulational Rapture (Dispensational Premillennialism)

Christ returns **secretly** to rapture the Church before a 7-year tribulation. After those 7 years he returns **publicly** to set up a literal 1,000-year kingdom with Israel. Two distinct comings separated by seven years.

Scripture cited: 1 Thess 4:13–18; 1 Cor 15:51–52; Matt 24:40–41; Rev 4:1 (“come up here” as a rapture picture); John 14:1–3; Dan 9:24–27 (the seventy weeks).

Proponents: John Nelson Darby, C. I. Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye, Chuck Swindoll, David Jeremiah, John MacArthur.

MODERN VARIANT

2. Midtribulational Rapture

Christ raptures the Church at the **midpoint** of the 7-year tribulation, just before the great tribulation’s worst “wrath of God” phase.

Scripture cited: Rev 11:15–19 (seventh trumpet); Dan 9:27 (“in the middle of the week”); 1 Thess 5:9.

Proponents: Norman Harrison (1939); Gleason Archer in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* (1984). Relatively minor in the 21st century.

MARVIN ROSENTHAL, 1990

3. Pre-wrath Rapture

The Church goes through the tribulation’s “wrath of Antichrist” but is raptured before the “wrath of God” — somewhere between the midpoint and the final trumpet.

Scripture cited: Rev 6:17 (“the great day of their wrath has come”); 1 Thess 5:9 (“God has not destined us for wrath”).

Proponents: Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Thomas Nelson, 1990); Robert Van Kampen; Alan Kurschner.

THE ANCIENT VIEW

4. Posttribulational Rapture (Historic Premillennialism)

The Church goes **through** the tribulation. At the end, when Christ returns publicly and gloriously, the living saints and the raised dead are caught up (1 Thess 4) to meet him and return with him to the earth. One coming, not two. Followed by the millennium.

Scripture cited: Matt 24:29–31 (“immediately *after* the tribulation of those days... he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect”); 2 Thess 2:1–8; 1 Cor 15:51–53 at “the last trumpet.”

Proponents: The Apostolic Fathers; Irenaeus; Justin Martyr; Tertullian; Cyprian; Lactantius; modern: George E. Ladd (*The Blessed Hope*, 1956; *A Commentary on the Revelation*, 1972), Douglas Moo, Craig Blomberg, Ben Witherington III.

AUGUSTINE ONWARD

5. Amillennialism (Single Return, Symbolic Millennium)

The “thousand years” of Revelation 20 is symbolic for the entire age of the Church between Christ’s resurrection and his return. Christ returns **once**, the dead are raised, the wicked and righteous are judged, and the new heavens and new earth begin. The Rapture, if we use the word at all, is just the catching up of saints at the one Second Coming.

Scripture cited: Rev 20:1–6 (read symbolically); Matt 13 (parables of the kingdom); 2 Pet 3:10–13; John 5:28–29.

Proponents: Augustine, *City of God* XX (c. 425); the medieval Western Church; Luther, Calvin, and the Reformed tradition; Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (1979); Kim Riddlebarger; Sam Storms; R. C. Sproul.

EDWARDS, WARFIELD

6. Postmillennialism

The gospel will gradually triumph in the world through the work of the Church, producing an extended period of peace and prosperity (the millennium, possibly but not necessarily a literal 1,000 years). At the end of that age of blessing, Christ returns publicly, the dead are raised, and final judgment occurs.

Scripture cited: Matt 13:31–33 (mustard seed and leaven parables); 1 Cor 15:25 (“he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet”); Ps 110; Hab 2:14.

Proponents: Jonathan Edwards, B. B. Warfield, Loraine Boettner, R. J. Rushdoony, Ken Gentry, Doug Wilson.

PARTIAL PRETERISM

7. Preterism (Partial and Full)

Many or most prophetic texts (Matt 24, Revelation, the “tribulation” language) were fulfilled in the events of AD 70 — the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple under Titus. *Partial preterists* hold that most tribulation prophecy was fulfilled in AD 70 but still await the future bodily resurrection and Second Coming. *Full (or “hyper-”)* *preterists* hold that all prophecy including the resurrection was fulfilled in AD 70 — a view the historic Church regards as heretical.

Scripture cited: Matt 24:34 (“*this generation* will not pass away”); Luke 21:20–24 (the surrounding of Jerusalem); the clear first-century context of Revelation written c. AD 68–95.

Proponents: Partial: R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (1998); Gary DeMar; Ken Gentry; N. T. Wright (with qualifications). Full: Max King; Don Preston (held by us to be heretical on the resurrection).

WHERE PLEASANT SPRINGS STANDS

Pleasant Springs Church teaches the **Posttribulational / Historic Premillennial** position with real sympathy for Amillennialism and Partial Preterism on a number of specific texts. We affirm:

1. There is *one* Second Coming of Jesus Christ, personal, bodily, visible, and glorious — not two comings separated by seven years.
2. The Church will pass through whatever tribulation the last age brings. “In the world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33) is not an exception but a promise.
3. At that coming, the dead in Christ will be raised, and those alive will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air — *in order to escort him down to earth*, not to be removed from it.
4. Christ will reign over a renewed creation, and God’s people will dwell with him forever on the new earth.

παρουσία

PAROUSIA

“Arrival, presence, official visit of a king.”

Etymologically: *para* (“alongside”) + *ousia* (“being”) — “being alongside,” “presence.”

Occurrences: 24 times in the New Testament (e.g., Matt 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19, 3:13, 4:15, 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1, 8, 9; James 5:7–8; 2 Pet 1:16, 3:4, 12; 1 John 2:28).

This is the single most important word in the New Testament vocabulary of the Second Coming, and it is almost always mistranslated as just “coming.” In the papyri and the inscriptions of the Greco-Roman world, *parousia* is the technical term for **the official arrival of a king, emperor, or provincial governor to one of the cities under his rule.**

The *parousia* of a Roman emperor was an event for which a city would prepare months in advance. Special coinage was struck to commemorate it. Triumphal arches were built. The city fathers and leading citizens formed a welcoming delegation and rode out beyond the gates to meet the approaching imperial party. When the delegation encountered the emperor on the road, they joined his procession and escorted him through the gates into the city, crowning the arrival with a formal entry, a sacrifice, and a civic feast.

When the New Testament writers call the return of Christ his *parousia*, their readers — living under Roman imperial rule, familiar with every detail of an imperial visit — would have heard this meaning immediately. The *parousia* of the Lord Jesus Christ is his official arrival as King. Those who belong to him go out to meet him and escort him in triumph **back into** his kingdom.

The word parousia in ordinary Greek is used for the official visit of a ruler or emperor. The earliest evidence in Jewish apocalyptic and early Christian usage already presupposes this technical sense.

— Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (1908), drawing on the papyri discoveries of the late 19th century

Deissmann (a German NT scholar, 1866–1937) was the first to systematically document the imperial background of the word from papyri and inscriptions found at Oxyrhynchus and elsewhere. His conclusion has been confirmed by every subsequent generation of NT lexicographers (Bauer-Danker, Moulton-Milligan, Kittel’s *TDNT*). There is no scholarly dispute about what *parousia* means. The only dispute is whether our traditional English translations have captured it.

PART 5 — WORD STUDY: APANTĒSIS (ἈΠΑΝΤΗΣΙΣ)

ἀπάντησις

APANTĒSIS

“A meeting, a welcoming delegation going out to greet a visiting dignitary and escort him back.”

Etymologically: *apo* (“from”) + *antan* (“to meet face to face”) — “to go out from the city to meet someone.”

Occurrences: three times in the New Testament — Matthew 25:6; Acts 28:15; and the decisive 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

This is the crucial word. When Paul says believers will be caught up “to meet the Lord in the air,” the word he uses is *eis apantēsin tou Kyriou* — “unto the *apantēsis* of the Lord.” This is not a generic English word for “meeting.” It is the precise Greek technical term for a civic reception of a visiting emperor, king, governor, or honored guest.

Look at the three New Testament uses:

Greek NT (Matt 25:6): μέσης δὲ νυκτὸς κραυγὴ γέγονεν· ἰδοὺ ὁ νυμφίος, ἐξέρχεσθε εἰς ἀπάντησιν αὐτοῦ.

Matthew 25:6 (ESV): “But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’”

The ten virgins go out *from the banquet hall* to meet the arriving bridegroom, and they escort him back to the house for the wedding feast. The bridegroom does not come, meet them, and leave with them. They meet him on the road and escort him in.

Greek NT (Acts 28:15): κάκειθεν οἱ ἀδελφοὶ ἀκούσαντες τὰ περὶ ἡμῶν ἦλθαν εἰς ἀπάντησιν ἡμῶν ἄχρι Ἀππίου φόρου καὶ Τριῶν ταβερνῶν.

Acts 28:15 (ESV): “And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns **to meet us**. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage.”

The Roman Christians heard Paul was approaching Rome and went out about 43 miles along the Appian Way to meet him — the apostle, their visiting dignitary — and escort him the rest of the way **into** Rome. They did not meet Paul at the Three Taverns and then leave Rome with him. They went out, met him, welcomed him, and brought him in.

Greek NT (1 Thess 4:17): ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἀέρα· καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 (ESV): “Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds **to meet the Lord** in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”

Paul uses the exact same word, *eis apantêsin*. The Thessalonian believers, who read Greek as their native tongue, would have heard this immediately: *we go out to meet the arriving King and escort him down to his kingdom*. The Rapture — the catching up — is the *apantêsis*, the imperial welcoming delegation, going out to greet the returning Emperor and bring him home. It is not an evacuation.

F. F. Bruce, one of the 20th century’s great evangelical New Testament scholars, puts it precisely in his Word Biblical Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians (1982): “When a dignitary paid an official visit to a city in Hellenistic times, the action of the leading citizens in going out to meet him and escort him back on the final stage of his journey was called the *apantêsis*. This is the

probable sense of *apantêsis* here... The Lord Jesus' *parousia* is his visit to his people on earth, and their going forth to meet him is their loyal acknowledgment of him."

PART 6 — WORD STUDY: HARPAZÔ (Ἀρπάζω)

ἄρπάζω

HARPAZÔ — HARPAGÊSOMETHA

"To seize, to snatch up, to catch away."

Occurrences: 14 times in the NT. The form in 1 Thess 4:17 is *harpagêsometha* ("we shall be caught up," 1st person plural future passive indicative). Jerome's Latin Vulgate renders the word *rapiemur*, from the verb *rapere*, from which comes the English word "Rapture."

The English word "Rapture" is not in the Bible. It comes to us through the 14th-century Old French *rapture* from Latin *raptus*, the participle of *rapere*, "to seize." Jerome chose *rapiemur* to translate Paul's Greek *harpagêsometha*, and "Rapture" became the convenient one-word English shorthand for "being caught up." There is nothing wrong with the word itself. What is wrong is the theological freight Darby and his successors loaded onto it.

How does Paul actually use *harpazô*? Look at the other passages where the same Greek verb appears:

John 10:12 — the wolf "*snatches* them and scatters them." (Violent seizure.)

Acts 8:39 — after baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch, "the Spirit of the Lord *carried Philip away*." (Sudden removal by divine initiative.)

2 Corinthians 12:2, 4 — Paul speaks of a man “*caught up* to the third heaven... *caught up* into paradise.” (Ecstatic/visionary experience.)

Revelation 12:5 — the male child “*caught up* to God and to his throne.” (Ascension imagery.)

In every other New Testament use, *harpazô* describes a sudden, divinely-initiated translation — but it never implies that the person caught up is then taken away to a separate heavenly destination and kept there for seven years while the earth burns below. Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 is caught up to the third heaven *and comes back*. Philip is carried away and reappears at Azotus preaching the gospel (Acts 8:40). The male child of Revelation 12 is caught up to God’s throne, which is the very place from which Christ himself will return to the earth.

The rapture of 1 Thessalonians 4:17, read with all three word studies together, is the sudden, divine catching-up of the Church’s living and raised dead, into the air (the atmospheric sphere, not an interstellar destination), *eis apantêsin tou Kyriou* — to form the royal welcoming party for the returning King. And then “*so we shall always be with the Lord.*” The word “always” is not “always in heaven” but “always with him” — wherever he goes, we go, because we are his court and his entourage. And he is coming to establish his reign on the earth.

PART 7 — THE PALM SUNDAY PATTERN

If you want to see the *apantêsis* pattern in action in the Gospels, read Palm Sunday. On the Sunday before Passover AD 33, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, fulfilling Zechariah 9:9. And this is what happened.

Greek NT (John 12:12–13): τῇ ἐπαύριον ὁ ὄχλος πολὺς ὁ ἐλθὼν εἰς τὴν ἑορτήν, ἀκούσαντες ὅτι ἔρχεται ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς Ἱερουσόλυμα, ἔλαβον τὰ βᾶϊα τῶν φοινίκων καὶ ἐξῆλθον εἰς ὑπάντησιν αὐτῷ...

John 12:12–13 (ESV): “The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and **went out to meet him...**”

The Greek verb in John 12:13 is *hypantêsin* — a compound of *apantêsis*. The grammatical form is the same (“going out to meet”), and the action is identical. The crowds went **out** from Jerusalem, met Jesus on the road, cut palm branches, laid down their cloaks, cried “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel!” and escorted him **into** the city. This is a *parousia* in miniature. The citizens of Jerusalem went out to meet their king and brought him in.

This is the picture Paul has in his head when he describes the *parousia* of the Lord Jesus. We will go out (be caught up) to meet him (*apantêsis*) and bring him back — not to Jerusalem but to a renewed earth, to the kingdom he has come to establish. Palm Sunday is the sacramental rehearsal of the final *parousia*.

Why does this matter? Because the Rapture as commonly preached in America involves believers being evacuated from earth and taken *away* to a heavenly Holding Pattern for seven years while the world suffers. The biblical picture is the exact opposite: believers rise to meet the King and *return with him* to take up residence in his new-creation kingdom. We are not raptured **from** the earth; we are caught up **to escort him to** the earth.

The New Testament’s vision of the end is not the church’s escape from the world but the Lord’s coming to the world, and his people welcoming him here. We will go out to meet him, yes — but we go out only so that we can come back with him, to the place he has always intended his people to dwell: a renewed earth under his just and peaceful reign.

— Matthew L. Halsted, *The End of the World as We Know It*, IVP Academic, 2023

PART 8 — 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13–18 — AUTHOR, AUDIENCE, CONTEXT

Author: The Apostle Paul, writing together with Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thess 1:1), probably from Corinth.

Date: c. AD 50–51 — one of the earliest surviving New Testament documents, written only about twenty years after the Resurrection.

Audience: A young Gentile (and some Jewish) Christian congregation in Thessalonica, the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. Acts 17:1–9 tells us how Paul, Silas, and Timothy founded this church in about three weeks of preaching in the city synagogue and in the home of a man named Jason. The congregation was driven by persecution to the home of Jason, who was arrested; Paul and his team fled by night to Berea. Not long after, the same persecution pushed Paul to Athens and then Corinth, from which he wrote this letter.

Occasion: In the time since Paul left, some of the Thessalonian believers had died — some perhaps from the persecution itself. The survivors were anxious. If the Lord returns soon, they reasoned, what happens to our brothers and sisters who died before he came? Are they excluded from the resurrection and kingdom? Have they missed the great rendezvous? Paul writes 1 Thess 4:13–18 to answer exactly that pastoral question.

*Greek NT (1 Thess 4:13–18): οὐ θέλομεν δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, περὶ τῶν κοιμωμένων, ἵνα μὴ λυπησθε καθὼς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα. εἰ γὰρ πιστεύομεν ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη, οὕτως καὶ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς κοιμηθέντας διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἄξει σὺν αὐτῷ. τοῦτο γὰρ ὑμῖν λέγομεν ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου, ὅτι ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι εἰς τὴν **παρουσίαν** τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν τοὺς κοιμηθέντας· ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος ἐν κελεύσματι, ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ, καταβήσεται ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ, καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον, ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς **ἀρπαγησόμεθα** ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς **ἀπάντησιν** τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἀέρα· καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἔσόμεθα. ὥστε παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις.*

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 (ESV): “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the **coming [parousia]** of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be **caught up [harpagêsometha]** together with them in the clouds **to meet [eis apantêsin]** the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

What Paul is saying, with the words as the Thessalonians would have heard them: The Lord is coming on his royal visit (*parousia*). When he arrives, his people — both the dead in Christ, raised first, and the living — will form the royal welcoming delegation (*apantêsis*). We will be

suddenly gathered (*harpagêsometha*) into the clouds, which is the zone of theophany in the Old Testament (Ex 19, Dan 7:13–14). We will meet him there. And from that meeting, being his court, we will *always* be with him — wherever he is. He is coming to the earth to set all things right; we will be with him there.

What this passage does not teach: that the Church is *removed* from the earth for seven years; that Christ comes part way and then retreats; that there are *two* Second Comings separated by a tribulation; that the Thessalonians should expect a secret pre-trib departure. None of these ideas are in the text or in the pastoral situation that called the text forth. Paul is consoling grieving believers who feared their dead were left out of the Lord’s coming. He answers: no, the dead are raised first, and then all of us together go out to greet him. Not a word about escape.

PART 9 — 2 THESSALONIANS 2 AND MATTHEW 24 — AUTHOR AND AUDIENCE

2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 — Paul’s clarification (c. AD 51–52). Some months after writing 1 Thessalonians, Paul learned that some believers there had come to believe — perhaps because of a forged letter in his name — that the Day of the Lord had already come. He wrote 2 Thessalonians partly to correct this.

Greek NT (2 Thess 2:1–4, selected): ἐρωτῶμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, ὑπὲρ τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ... μὴ τις ὑμᾶς ἐξαπατήσῃ κατὰ μηδένα τρόπον· ὅτι ἐὰν μὴ ἔλθῃ ἡ ἀποστασία πρῶτον καὶ ἀποκαλυφθῇ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας.

2 Thessalonians 2:1–4 (ESV, selected): “Now concerning **the coming [parousia]** of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him... Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, **unless the rebellion comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed**, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god.”

Paul explicitly says that the *parousia* does not happen **until** after (1) the apostasy comes, and (2) the Man of Lawlessness is revealed and takes his seat in the temple. If there were a pretribulational rapture, Paul would say here: “Don’t worry, you’ll be gone before the Man of Lawlessness appears.” He says the opposite. He comforts the Thessalonians by telling them the

signs that must come first. They will see those signs. The pretrib doctrine makes 2 Thessalonians 2 pastorally incoherent; the posttrib (and the amill) reading makes it obvious.

Matthew 24 — the Olivet Discourse (c. AD 30, written down c. AD 60s or earlier).

Author: Matthew, one of the Twelve, tax collector of Capernaum. **Audience:** Jewish-Christian readers in Syria-Palestine; some argue Antioch. **Occasion:** Jesus’s disciples, impressed by the Temple’s size, ask him two questions on the Mount of Olives: (a) when will these things (the Temple’s destruction) happen? (b) what will be the sign of your *parousia* and of the end of the age?

Greek NT (Matt 24:29–31): εὐθέως δὲ μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐκείνων ὁ ἥλιος σκοτισθήσεται... καὶ τότε φανήσεται τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν οὐρανῷ... καὶ ὄψονται τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ μετὰ δυνάμεως καὶ δόξης πολλῆς. καὶ ἀποστελεῖ τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ μετὰ σάλπιγγος μεγάλης, καὶ ἐπισυνάξουσιν τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ἀνέμων.

Matthew 24:29–31 (ESV): “**Immediately after the tribulation of those days** the sun will be darkened... Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man... they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud **trumpet call**, and they will gather his elect from the four winds.”

Jesus’s own timing is unambiguous. The coming of the Son of Man on the clouds (*parousia*) happens **immediately after the tribulation**. The trumpet call, the gathering of the elect — this is the same event Paul describes in 1 Thess 4. Not a pre-tribulational rescue; a post-tribulational vindication. The elect have endured through the tribulation.

The matter of Matthew 24:40–41 (“one will be taken, the other left”). This passage is often cited as a picture of the pretrib Rapture: one Christian is taken up while the other is left behind. Read in the context of the surrounding verses, however, the meaning reverses. Jesus has just compared his coming to the days of Noah: “they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they did not know *until the flood came and took them all away*” (Matt 24:38–39). In Noah’s day, the ones “taken” were the wicked, swept away in the flood; the ones “left” were Noah’s family, preserved on the earth. When Jesus says “one will be taken and the other left,” he is drawing the same picture: the wicked are taken

away in judgment, the righteous remain to inherit the new creation. The common American reading of this verse actually inverts Jesus's intended point.

PART 10 — MATTHEW L. HALSTED, *THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT* (2023)

Matthew L. Halsted (b. 1983)

PHD NEW TESTAMENT, UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN • FORMER DISPENSATIONAL PASTOR • ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF BIBLICAL STUDIES, ETERNITY BIBLE COLLEGE • AUTHOR OF *THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT: WHAT THE BIBLE REALLY SAYS ABOUT THE END TIMES (AND WHY IT'S GOOD NEWS)*, IVP ACADEMIC, 2023

Post-Dispensational NT Scholar

IVP 2023

Matthew Halsted was trained within the dispensational framework and spent years in dispensational churches and pulpits before the close exegetical work of doctoral-level New Testament study pushed him out. His 2023 IVP book, written for lay readers without sacrificing scholarly rigor, is the single best current introduction to the biblical alternative. Its principal arguments align point-for-point with what we have laid out in this lesson.

Halsted's five main arguments:

1. The Bible's end-time vision is not escape from creation; it is the renewal of creation.

Revelation 21 does not show believers leaving the earth for heaven. It shows the new Jerusalem coming *down* from God out of heaven to a renewed earth. The direction of travel is *God to us, not us away to God*.

2. The "Rapture" of 1 Thessalonians 4 is the resurrection-welcome of the King.

Using the imperial *parousia* and *apantêsis* background, Halsted (following F. F. Bruce, N. T.

Wright, and most mainstream NT scholars) shows that Paul’s picture is the Church going out to meet the Lord and returning with him.

3. Dispensational reading of Daniel 9:24–27 is the keystone that must be removed. The alleged “gap” between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel (into which the “Church age” fits, with the Rapture at the end) is an invention that no ancient Jewish or Christian interpreter saw. The seventy weeks were fulfilled in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ.

4. The “Antichrist” of Revelation is not a future globalist political figure but a pattern fulfilled supremely in the Roman persecuting emperors (especially Nero and Domitian) and continuing in every political power that demands absolute loyalty from God’s people. The persecuted first-century readers of Revelation would never have guessed that the beast was a future Brussels bureaucrat.

5. The Christian posture toward the end is faithful witness, not escape. Rapture eschatology has produced a century of American Christians who do not expect to be here for the hard times and who therefore do not build institutions, engage culture, or endure suffering with the confidence of people who are staying. The biblical posture is Psalm 37:34 — “Wait for the Lord and keep his way, and he will exalt you to inherit the land.” *We inherit the land. We do not flee it.*

PART 11 — DON’T BE CARRIED AWAY

Paul’s pastoral concern in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3 is that his congregation *not be deceived* about the Lord’s *parousia* — not be “quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us.” Two thousand years later the warning applies just as forcefully.

THREE PASTORAL WARNINGS

Do not be carried away *before* the tribulation by date-setters, prophecy chart-writers, or apocalyptic novelists who promise you will be evacuated. The Apostles did not promise this. Christ did not promise this. Live as Paul and John and Polycarp and Bonhoeffer lived — ready to die for the gospel, not eager to escape it.

Do not be carried away *during* any tribulation into panic, rage, or conspiracy. The Lamb has overcome the world (John 16:33). The God who kept his people through the Babylonian captivity, the persecution of Nero, the twentieth-century purges, and a thousand other horrors will keep us. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?” (Rom 8:35). No.

Do not be carried away *after* any tribulation into cynicism or faithlessness because the version of the end you were promised did not arrive on schedule. The Lord is not slow about his promise (2 Pet 3:9). The end is certain; the timing belongs to the Father (Acts 1:7). The word to the Church is always the same: “Occupy till I come” (Luke 19:13 KJV). Work. Witness. Endure. Build. Love. Plant trees and start churches and raise children and write books as if the world is going to be here tomorrow, because — when the Lord comes — he is bringing the kingdom *here*, not taking us somewhere else.

Greek NT (Rev 21:2–3): καὶ τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν Ἰερουσαλὴμ καινὴν εἶδον καταβαίνουσαν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἡτοιμασμένην ὡς νύμφην κεκοσμημένην τῷ ἀνδρὶ αὐτῆς. καὶ ἤκουσα φωνῆς μεγάλης ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου λεγούσης· ἰδοὺ ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

Revelation 21:2–3 (ESV): “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, **coming down out of heaven** from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is **with man**. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.’”

The end of the story is God coming down to us. The direction of hope in the whole Bible is God moving toward his creation to restore it, not his people being lifted away from it. This is the good news.

If this lesson has been long, here is the short version. A page you can share with a friend or tape inside the cover of your Bible.

WHY PLEASANT SPRINGS CHURCH DOES NOT TEACH THE RAPTURE DOCTRINE

1. The doctrine is new. The pretribulational secret-Rapture teaching was invented by John Nelson Darby in Ireland around 1830. No Apostle, no Church Father, no Reformer, and no major Christian teacher before Darby ever taught it. Eighteen centuries of Christians read the same Bible and never saw it.

2. The Greek words do not mean what the Rapture doctrine requires them to mean.

- *Parousia* (παρουσία) means the **royal arrival of a king**, not a secret whisking-away of citizens.
- *Apantêsis* (ἀπάντησις) means the **welcoming delegation going out to meet a dignitary and escort him in**, not citizens meeting him and leaving with him.
- *Harpazô* (ἁρπάζω) means to be **suddenly caught up**, yes — but in every other use in the New Testament it describes a momentary event, not a permanent removal to another destination. Jerome's Latin *rapiemur* gave us the English word "Rapture," but it does not give us Darby's doctrine.

3. The pattern in Scripture is Palm Sunday, not a helicopter evacuation.

When the King comes, his people go out to meet him and escort him home. That is what happened at Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and that is the same verb family (*hypantêsis* / *apantêsis*) Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. We will meet the Lord in the air only to usher him down to his kingdom on the earth — the earth he is coming to renew, not abandon.

4. The direction of biblical hope is God coming down to us, not us being taken up away from earth. Revelation 21:2–3: the holy city comes *down* out of heaven; God's dwelling place is with man. The end of the story is the renewal of creation, not its evacuation.

5. Therefore do not be carried away — before, during, or after any tribulation — by fear, date-setting, or promises of escape. Live, work, suffer, witness, build, love, and die (if called to) as the early Church did: confident that the King is coming, eager to meet him when he does, and willing to go through whatever comes in the meantime, because the same Lord who promised to return has promised to keep us until he does.

And Yet — We Are All Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Pleasant Springs does not teach the Rapture doctrine, and we have given you the reasons. But we want to say just as clearly: **we do not regard our pretribulational, midtribulational, or pre-wrath brothers and sisters as less Christian than we are.** They love the same Lord. They read the same Bible. They preach the same gospel of Christ crucified and risen. Many of them — the Graham family, the Walvoord family, the LaHaye family, and millions of others — have borne faithful Christian witness for generations.

Differences over eschatology are not the boundary of Christian fellowship. The Apostles' Creed is. The gospel is. The Lordship of Jesus Christ is. If you are a pretribulationist and you confess that Jesus is Lord, that he died for your sins and rose bodily from the dead on the third day, that he will come again to judge the living and the dead, and that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone — then you and we are *family*, and any disagreement we have about the Rapture is an in-house disagreement among the redeemed, not a wall between Christians.

We teach what we teach because we believe the Bible teaches it. We welcome you to disagree with us. We welcome you to worship with us. We welcome you to the Lord's Table with us. And we will wait together — each in our way, each with our books open — for the one *parousia* of the one Lord Jesus Christ, who will settle every one of these arguments in the moment he appears.

Greek NT (1 Cor 13:12): βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι' ἑσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι, τότε δὲ πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον· ἄρτι γινώσκω ἐκ μέρους, τότε δὲ ἐπιγνώσομαι καθὼς καὶ ἐπεγνώσθην.

1 Corinthians 13:12 (ESV): “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”

In the essentials, unity. In the non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, King of the coming kingdom, we confess we have often been afraid of your coming rather than eager for it, because we have been taught by systems men invented in the nineteenth century rather than by the Apostles who knew you. Forgive us. Give us Paul's clear eye and the early Church's steady heart. Teach us to read your Word in its own language, to hear it with the ears of its first audience, and to find our hope not in escape but in your *parousia* — your royal arrival, when you will come with the sound of the trumpet and all your saints with you, and we who are yours will go out to meet you in the air and escort you down, singing, to the renewed earth that is your kingdom. Keep us from being carried away before, during, or after any tribulation. Make us faithful witnesses of your certain return, steady workers in the fields you have given us, patient sufferers of whatever the world brings, and hopeful heirs of the world to come. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Before reading this lesson, where did you first encounter the word “Rapture”? Was it presented as *one* view among several, or simply as “what the Bible teaches”? If the latter, what does it tell us about how our teachers decide what is “obvious”?

2. Read the Didache chapter 16, Irenaeus *Against Heresies* V.29, and Cyril of Jerusalem *Lecture* 15. None of them knew Darby's 1830 doctrine. What does their unanimous voice suggest about the claim that pretribulationism is “just what the Bible says”?

3. Study the three New Testament uses of *apantêsis*: Matthew 25:6, Acts 28:15, 1 Thessalonians 4:17. In each of the first two uses, the “meeting” party escorts the arriving

person somewhere. Where? Apply the same logic to 1 Thess 4:17.

4. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1–4, Paul explicitly says the Day of the Lord will *not* come until after the apostasy and the revelation of the Man of Lawlessness. How would this pastoral word function if Paul had also taught that the Thessalonians would be raptured before seeing any of this?

5. Matthew Halsted argues that the Rapture doctrine has produced a century of American Christians who are “eager to leave the world rather than inherit it.” Is this true in your experience? How might your own community’s witness look different if you expected to be here for whatever comes, and to welcome the returning King on a renewed earth?

FURTHER READING

- **Primary resource for this lesson:** Matthew L. Halsted, *The End of the World as We Know It: What the Bible Really Says about the End Times (And Why It’s Good News)*, IVP Academic, 2023
- N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, HarperOne, 2008 — classic popular statement of the new-creation alternative
- N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Fortress, 2003 — the scholarly foundation
- George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope: A Biblical Study of the Second Advent and the Rapture*, Eerdmans, 1956 — the classic posttribulational premillennial case
- Ben Witherington III, *Revelation and the End Times: Unraveling God’s Message of Hope*, Abingdon, 2010
- Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, Eerdmans, 1979 — the standard amillennial presentation
- Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung (eds.), *A Case for Historic Premillennialism*, Baker Academic, 2009

- Darrell L. Bock (ed.), *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, Zondervan, 1999 — a useful compare-and-contrast
- **On the origin of dispensationalism:** Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930*, University of Chicago, 1970
- Dave MacPherson, *The Rapture Plot*, Millennium III, 1995 — the controversial but well-documented MacDonald origin theory
- Clarence B. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism*, Eerdmans, 1960 — classic critique from within evangelical scholarship
- **Greek word studies:** Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, Hodder, 1910 — the papyri evidence for *parousia* and *apantêsis*
- Gerhard Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. V (1967), articles on παρουσία and ἀπάντησις
- F. F. Bruce, *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Word, 1982 — on 1 Thess 4:17
- **Primary sources on early Church eschatology:** The Didache, ch. 16; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V.25–35; Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*; Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture 15* — all readily available in the Ante-Nicene Fathers and Nicene/Post-Nicene Fathers series
- Augustine, *City of God*, Book XX — the classical amillennial text

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