

THE RAPTURE AND THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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The relevance of the book of Revelation to the issue of the timing of the rapture is unquestioned. Assumptions common to many who participate in discussing the issue include the authorship of the book by John the apostle, the date of its writing in the last decade of the first century A.D., and the book's prophetic nature in continuation of OT prophecies related to national Israel. Ten proposed references to the rapture in Revelation include Rev 3:10-11; 4:1-2; 4:4 and 5:9-10; 6:2; 7:9-17; 11:3-12; 11:15-19; 12:5; 14:14-16; and 20:4. An evaluation of these ten leads to Rev 3:10-11 as the only passage in Revelation to speak of the rapture. Rightly understood, that passage implicitly supports a pretribulation rapture of the church. That understanding of the passage fits well into the context of the message to the church at Philadelphia.

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“As the major book of prophecy in the NT, Revelation has great pertinence to discussion of the rapture.”¹ Participants in the discussion concerning the timing of the rapture would concur with this statement. Proponents of a pretribulation, midtribulation, pre-wrath, and posttribulation rapture all seek support for their positions in the book of Revelation.² Many suggestions as to where Revelation

¹Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973) 64.

²Many books dealing with the rapture include sections specifically discussing the book of Revelation. Examples include the following: [Pretribulation] Allen Beechick, *The Pre-tribulation Rapture* (Denver: Accent Books, 1980) 161-89; Russell L. Penney, “The Rapture of the Church and the Book of Revelation,” *A Bible Handbook to Revelation*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001) 187-96; John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question: Revised and Enlarged Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 253-68; [Midtribulation] James O. Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963) 2:424-538; [Pre-wrath] Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Nelson, 1990) 179-86; [Posttribulation] Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* 64-88; Douglas J. Moo, “The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position,” *The*

explicitly or implicitly refers to the rapture of the church have been forthcoming. The present article purposes to survey the proposals about where Revelation refers to the event and to ascertain which proposal best accords with the data discovered in the book.

Michael Svigel states, "One must ask *where* the Rapture is found in the Revelation before one asks the question of *when* the Rapture is said to take place, if, indeed, the timing of the event is even asserted by the context."³ This article will first state the assumptions concerning the book of Revelation held by almost all evangelical participants in the rapture discussion. The debate about the where and the when of the rapture should not obscure the agreement on many essential issues concerning the book among the disputants. They acknowledge most of these common assumptions as the basis on which the question of the rapture is argued. Second, the greater part of the following discussion will concentrate on ten passages in Revelation that have been proposed as references to the event. Each proposal will be presented and evaluated.⁴ The evaluations will lead to the conclusion that the rapture is implied in Rev 3:10-11. Therefore, third, a brief exposition of Rev 3:7-13 will describe how the understanding of future events by the author of Revelation corresponds to that of the apostle Paul and is consistent with a pretribulationrapture view.

Common Assumptions concerning the Book of Revelation

Only a limited number of biblical commentators mention the issue of the rapture and the book of Revelation. Bigger issues claim the attention of most writers on the book. Among evangelical authors who do discuss the rapture's relationship to Revelation, widespread agreement prevails among many on three assumptions concerning introductory and interpretive issues.

The Author of the Book

Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-tribulation? (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 196-205; Alexander Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1975) 73-94.

³Michael J. Svigel, "The Apocalypse of John and the Rapture of the Church: A Reevaluation," *Trinity Journal* 22NS (2001):24.

⁴Each of the ten proposals merits a separate article; however, the scope of the present study limits this article to cursory treatments. For further insights, the reader is directed to three recently published exegetical commentaries on Revelation: David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, vol. 52A of Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1997); David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B of Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Nelson, 1998); David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, vol. 52C of Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Nelson, 1998); G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1992); Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995). A fourth work, Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, in *The Baker Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), was unavailable at the time of writing.

The first common assumption is that the author is John. He refers to himself as “John” four times in the book (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). This has been understood in accordance with the testimony of the early church fathers as a reference to John the apostle.⁵ Two implications emerge from this view of authorship. First, John was present with the other apostles when Jesus gave His Olivet Discourse as recorded in Matt 24:1–25:46. He was also a part of the apostolic group whom Jesus taught “the things concerning the kingdom of God”⁶ (Acts 1:3). Therefore, the framework of the author’s understanding of future events goes back to Jesus Himself.⁷ John’s eschatological framework received from Christ included:

1. Israel’s rejection of Jesus as Messiah delayed the establishment of the messianic Kingdom and resulted in the desolation of Israel’s temple (Matt 23:37-38; 24:2).
2. During the present age, Jesus will build His church. (Matt 16:16-19; Acts 1:6-8).
3. Jesus will personally come again to take His disciples to the dwelling places He is preparing for them in heaven (John 14:2-3). This return for His disciples is imminent (1 John 3:2).
4. The second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth will be preceded by a period of tribulation for Israel and the nations (Matt 24:3-28) which will culminate in Israel’s acceptance of Jesus as Messiah (Matt 23:39).
5. Jesus will return to the earth to establish His messianic Kingdom, which will include righteous Israelites and Gentiles (Matt 24:29–25:46).

Second, John writes of the second coming of Jesus Christ in other NT books (John 14:1-3; 1 John 2:28; 3:2). In John 14:2, the apostle records Jesus’ words concerning His Father’s house to which He was going to prepare a place for His disciples. The Father’s house must refer to heaven because Jesus ascended into heaven, having been exalted to the right hand of God after His earthly life (Acts 2:33-34). John 14:3 states Jesus’ promise to His disciples, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there

⁵D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris present the early Christian testimony and the contemporary discussion concerning the authorship of Revelation (*An Introduction to the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992] 468-72). They conclude, “We are thus inclined to accept the testimony of those who were in a position to know about these matters, and we attribute both books [the Fourth Gospel and Revelation] to John the apostle, ‘the beloved disciple’” (ibid., 472). Everett F. Harrison reaches a similar conclusion (*Introduction to the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971] 467-72).

⁶Scripture references in this article are from the *New American Standard Bible*, 1971 edition.

⁷A previous article in this issue of *The Master’s Seminary Journal* by Robert L. Thomas, “Imminence in the NT, Especially Paul’s Thessalonian Epistles,” reaches a similar conclusion that the origin of the NT writers’ eschatological understanding, especially concerning imminence, “was none other than Jesus Himself” (*TMSJ* 13/2 [Fall 2002]:192-99).

you may be also.” The return of Christ for His disciples would result in the disciples being with Jesus in heaven.⁸ John implies that this coming again of Jesus, the Son of the Father, for His little children is an imminent event (1 John 2:28) and that the hope of being like Jesus when believers see Him is a purifying hope (1 John 3:2-3).

The Date of the Book

There is also a common assumption regarding the date of writing. A few evangelical scholars would put the book of Revelation early during the time of the Roman emperor Nero (A.D. 54-68) in the mid to late 60s. But following the testimony of the early church, most would date its appearance during the reign of the emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96) in the last decade of the first century, between ca. A.D. 90-95.⁹ When John states, “I . . . was on the island called Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (1:9), Domitian’s persecution against the church caused this exile, according to the early church fathers.

This dating negates the preterist position. Kenneth Gentry, Jr., argues for the preterist viewpoint. He writes,

“Preterism” holds that the bulk of John’s prophecies occur in the *first century*, soon after his writing of them. Though the prophecies were in the future when John wrote and when his original audience read them, they are now in *our* past. . . . The preterist view does understand Revelation’s prophecies as strongly reflecting actual historical events, though they are set in apocalyptic drama and clothed in poetic hyperbole.¹⁰

For Gentry, Revelation is prophetic, speaking about the future from the time of John and his audience until the second coming of Jesus Christ. Most of the events referred to in the book were fulfilled with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. To posit this, he has to argue that the book was written before A.D. 70.¹¹ But if the book was written in A.D. 90-95, his view is wrong.

Further, the later date assumes that the author and the original readers knew about Paul’s letters. Approximately thirty years earlier, the apostle Peter had written to churches in northern Asia Minor that the apostle Paul had written “some things hard to understand” (2 Pet 3:16). This shows that the apostle Paul’s writings had extended beyond the churches addressed and that they were becoming known throughout the NT church, particularly the churches in Asia Minor. Included in the

⁸Richard L. Mayhue notes, “The phrase ‘wherever I am,’ while implying continued presence in general, here means presence in heaven in particular. . . . In John 14:3, ‘where I am’ must mean ‘in heaven’ or the intent of 14:1-3 would be wasted and worthless” (*Snatched Before the Storm!* [Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1980] 13).

⁹Carson, Moo, and Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* 473-76; Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* 472-75.

¹⁰Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., “A Preterist View of Revelation,” *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, ed. C. Marvin Pate (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) 37-38.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 45-46.

Pauline corpus was the teaching concerning the rapture, particularly in 1 Thess 4:13-18 and 1 Cor 15:35-58. Therefore, it is reasonable that John and his audience already accepted three very vital truths concerning the future rapture. First, the future coming of Christ for the church will include the bodily resurrection of the dead in Christ and the bodily transformation of those Christians still living. Paul made it clear that “the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:16b-17). This will be an instantaneous change for those who are alive when Christ returns, as explained in 1 Cor 15:52-53, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. . . . For this perishable must put on the imperishable.” Second, this “catching up,” the rapture of the church, will result in Christians always being with the Lord from that point on. Third, and most important, the rapture of the church will be a distinct event or a distinct phase of the second coming of Christ. John’s audience in Revelation recognized that this distinct event or distinct phase, the rapture of the church, will precede the actual coming of Jesus Christ physically to this earth to establish His millennial Kingdom. By how much time it will precede that actual coming depends on whether the catching up will be pre-wrath, pre-, mid-, or posttribunational.

The Prophetic Nature of the Book

The third common assumption about the book of Revelation is that it is a prophetic writing. John claimed to be a prophet. Revelation 22:9 states, “I am a fellow-servant of you and of your brethren the prophets.” John is a NT counterpart of the OT prophets and he refers to his writing as prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19). The book claims to be a word of prophecy from God the Father through Jesus Christ to His bondservant John for the church (1:1). The original audience was the seven churches of Asia Minor (1:4, 11, 20). But many writers assume that the writing was recorded for the churches, not only of that time era, but also as Scripture for the church of Jesus Christ in the church age. The prophecy of Revelation is in continuity with the OT prophets,¹² looking forward to God’s ultimate design for His creation. The OT prophets also looked ahead at what the destiny was for God’s creation, a destiny which many accept to be particularly the future repentance of the nation of Israel (Hos 14:1-8; Zech 12:10-14), the coming of the Messiah (Zech 14:3-4), the restoration of Israel to their land (Ezek 37:24-28), and the establishment of the prophetic kingdom (Isa 9:6-7). The OT prophets also dealt with how Gentile nations fit into the program God had for Israel’s future (Isa 2:2-4). John is in continuity with those OT prophets. This is the background against which John gives his word of prophecy.

¹²Beale, *The Book of Revelation* 76-99, discusses the use of the OT in the book of Revelation. The Apocalypse contains more OT references than any other NT book. Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel are the OT books most used with Daniel as the most influential. Beale quotes with the approval the evaluation of I. Fransen, “The familiarity with the Old Testament, with the spirit which lives in the Old Testament, is the most essential condition for a fruitful reading of the Apocalypse” (97).

Almost all believe that a futuristic perspective is the key to interpreting Revelation because it is a prophetic book. Many view all the visions recorded in 4:1–22:5 as referring to events that are still in the future. This viewpoint is in contrast to the preterist, historicist, and idealist viewpoints.¹³

Further, the premillennial perspective holds the coming of Christ to the earth to precede the establishment of the millennial Kingdom. This premillennial position is in contrast to the amillennial and postmillennial positions. Amillennialist Anthony Hoekema incorporates the rapture as one element in the posttribulation return of Christ. He writes,

We conclude therefore that there is no Scriptural basis for the two-phase Second Coming taught by pretribulationists. The Second Coming of Christ must be thought of as a single event, which occurs after the great tribulation. When Christ returns, there will be a general resurrection, both of believers and unbelievers. After the resurrection, believers who are then still alive shall be transformed and glorified (I Cor. 15:51-52). The “rapture” of all believers then takes place. Believers who have been raised, together with living believers who have been transformed, are now caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (I Thess. 4:16-17). After this meeting in the air, the raptured church continues to be with Christ as he completes his descent to earth.¹⁴

In a similar fashion, postmillennialist Keith Mathison locates the bodily resurrection of all believers at the second coming of Christ, which will occur after the millennium.¹⁵ John Walvoord is correct when he observes, “In general, discussion of the rapture of the church continues to be limited to those holding the premillennial interpretation, with liberal interpreters and amillennarians largely ignoring the subject.”¹⁶

¹³These four interpretive approaches to Revelation are succinctly described in John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* ([Nashville: Word, 1997] 1990). “The *preterist* approach interprets Revelation as a description of first century events in the Roman Empire. . . . The *historicist* approach views Revelation as a panoramic view of church history from apostolic times to the present. . . . The *idealist* approach interprets Revelation as a timeless depiction of the cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil. . . . The *futurist* approach insists that the events of chaps. 6–22 are yet future, and that those chapters literally and symbolically depict actual people and events yet to appear on the world scene.” An exposition of preterism is presented by Gentry, “A Preterist View of Revelation,” *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* 37-92. In the same volume appears Sam Hamstra, Jr., “An Idealist View of Revelation” 95-131.

¹⁴Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 170-71.

¹⁵Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1999) 223-33.

¹⁶Walvoord, *The Rapture Question: Revised and Expanded Edition* 7.

The Proposed “Rapture” Passages in Revelation

Some commentators on Revelation aver that the rapture is a Pauline teaching that is not to be expected in John’s Apocalypse. For example, Robert Mounce opines, “It should be noted, however, that the very discussion of a ‘rapture of the church’ lies outside John’s frame of reference. He knows nothing of such a ‘rapture.’”¹⁷ However, it has been shown above that John and his audience would have known of Paul’s teaching and would have been expected to incorporate it into their understanding of future events. Svigel’s conclusion on this issue is to be noted:

However, if we comprehend the book as being John’s accurate reporting of revelatory visions from heaven, the issue of whether or not John was aware of the doctrine of the Rapture is insignificant. While acknowledging the divine prerogative to the contrary, one cannot help but expect God to reveal something of the Rapture in his last great apocalyptic message to the Church. In sum, one cannot excise the Rapture from the Apocalypse simply because it is a Pauline and not a Johannine doctrine if the book is a presentation of revelatory visions from heaven. The issue then is not whether it is Pauline or Johannine, but whether it is true.¹⁸

The rapture can be expected either explicitly or implicitly in Revelation. Therefore, this section will state and evaluate the different proposals about where in the book it is found.

Revelation 3:10-11

The most important and most widely discussed of the proposed passages where the rapture is referred to in the book is Rev 3:10-11: “‘Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I will also keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth. I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown.’” David Winfrey writes, “If there is a ‘proof text’ for the pretribulation position, it is Rev 3:10.”¹⁹

The Proposal. J. Dwight Pentecost articulates the pretribulation understanding of this passage:

¹⁷Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, rev ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 119.

¹⁸Svigel, “The Apocalypse of John and the Rapture of the Church: A Reevaluation” 25.

¹⁹David G. Winfrey, “The Great Tribulation: Kept ‘Out of’ or ‘Through’?” *Grace Theological Journal* 3 (1982):5.

"I will keep thee from the hour of temptation." John uses the word *ἔρεω*.²⁰ Thayer says that when this verb is used with *en* it means "to cause one to persevere or stand firm in a thing"; while when it is used with *ek* it means "by guarding to cause one to escape in safety out of."²¹ Since *ek* is used here it would indicate that John is promising a removal from the sphere of testing, not a preservation through it. This is further substantiated by the use of the words "the hour." God is not only guarding from the trials but from the very hour itself when these trials will come on those earth dwellers.²²

Gerald Stanton derives four facts from Rev 3:10. First, this promise applies not only to one local assembly existing in the days of the apostle John but to the entire church of Jesus Christ. The constant refrain in all seven messages from Christ to these churches is "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Second, the trial which is coming is not local, but is "about to come upon the whole world." The persecutions of the past were usually limited to one country or area. This trial must refer to the tribulation to come when all the world will be "amazed and follow after the beast" (13:3), and all who worship him will come under the wrath of God (13:8; 14:9-11). Third, "those who dwell on the earth" is not a suitable description for the members of the church (cf. Phil 3:20; Heb 11:13). Fourth, the grammar of *τηρέω ἐκ* (*ἔρεω ek*), though not conclusive, favors 'removal from' the hour of trial.²³ Stanton concludes,

In the words "I come quickly" [3:11] may be seen the rapture, and the reference to "thy crown" [3:11] suggests the Bema seat judgment to follow. "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Here, then, is a promise which clearly indicates the pretribulation rapture of the Church.²⁴

Evaluation. As would be expected, those who do not subscribe to the pretribulation position have taken issue with this understanding of 3:10-11. The earliest challenge was represented in the writings of Alexander Reese and George Ladd. While they accept the position that 3:10 is applicable to the church and the hour of testing is a portion of the tribulation period, they argue that *ἔρεω ek* is better

²⁰John uses the verb *τηρέω* (*ἔρεω*, "to keep") twice in 3:10. He first uses the aorist active indicative *ἐτήρησας* (*eṭērēsas*, "you kept," cf. 3:8). Secondly, he uses the future active indicative *τηρήσω* (*tērēō*, "I will keep"). The preposition *ἐκ* (*ek*, "from, out of, away from") follows the second usage of the verb.

²¹Pentecost cites Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (New York: American Book, 1889) 622.

²²J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Dunham, 1958) 216.

²³Gerald B. Stanton, *Kept from the Hour* (Miami Springs, Fla.: Schoettle Publishing Company, 1991) 46-50.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 50.

understood as ‘deliverance through’ rather than ‘kept from’ in this verse.²⁵ Both refer to John 17:15 and Gal 1:4 in support of their understanding of *tēreō ek* in Rev 3:10. Ladd argues succinctly:

This language, however, neither asserts nor demands the idea of the bodily removal from the midst of the coming trial. This is proven by the fact that precisely the same words are used by our Lord in His prayer that God would keep His disciples “out of the evil” (*tēreōs ek tou ponērou*, Jn. 17:15). In our Lord’s prayer, there is no idea of bodily removal of the disciples from the evil world but of preservation from the power of evil even when they are in its very presence. A similar thought occurs in Galatians 1:4, where we read that Christ gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from (literally, “out of,” *ek*) this present evil age. This does not refer to a physical removal from the age but to a deliverance from its power. “This age” will not pass away until the return of Christ.²⁶

Reese also adds Heb 5:7 in his presentation:

The same lesson is taught in a remarkable passage in Heb. v., where we read that our Lord, in Gethsamane, “had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from (*ek*, out of) death, and was heard in that he feared” (v.7). Here is a case where we know that the Lord suffered and passed through death, and yet was saved out of it. Anything more decisive than this passage could not be wished for.²⁷

Pretribulationists have countered these assertions by pointing out the John 17:15, Gal 1:4, and Heb 5:7 are not directly analogous to Rev 3:10. Walvoord declares, “The thought of the Greek is to ‘keep from,’ not ‘keep in.’ The promise was to be kept from ‘the hour’ of trial, not just the trials in the hour.”²⁸

The pretribulationist position concerning 3:10-11 has also been discounted by some who declare that the promise was given for the Philadelphian church only. J. Barton Payne represents this position. According to Payne, most of the prophecies concerning tribulation in Revelation have already been fulfilled and the coming of Christ is imminent. The church at Philadelphia no longer exists, so the promise has

²⁵Reese states “[M]any of the most competent Greek scholars unhesitatingly maintain that the use in Rev. iii. 10 of the preposition *ek* from *out of the midst of*—not merely *out of*—is precisely the consideration that demands the very opposite conclusion to that which pre-tribs wish. According to these scholars the Greek means that Christ promised the Angel at Philadelphia preservation throughout the hour of tribulation” (*The Approaching Advent of Christ* 201). George E. Ladd writes, “[T]he promise of Revelation 3:10 of being kept *ek* the hour of trial need not be a promise of a removal from the very physical presence of tribulation. It is a promise of preservation and deliverance in and through it” (*The Blessed Hope* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956] 85-86).

²⁶Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* 85. The same argument is presented by Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ* 203-4.

²⁷Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ* 204-5.

²⁸Walvoord, *The Rapture Question: Revised and Enlarged Edition* 66.

to refer to a historical trial endured by the Philadelphian church when Christ kept them from harm.²⁹ However, the recurring refrain “what the Spirit says to the churches” does expand the application of what Christ said specifically to the other seven churches of Asia and to the other churches who would hear the book of Revelation read.³⁰

The latest and most vigorous posttribulational discussion on 3:10 is that of Gundry who devotes almost seven pages to this passage.³¹ He argues that *tēreō* here means “to keep, by guarding to cause one to escape in safety out of” and that *ek* means to “emerge from out of.” Putting the terms together, he states, “[W]e properly understand *τηρέω ἐκ* (*tēreō ek*) as protection issuing in emission.”³² Further, he argues from the usage of the term “hour” in the Gospels (Matt 26:45; Mark 14:35, 41; John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1) that the emphasis falls on the experience within the time, rather than on the period of time as such. “Stress does not lie on the period *per se*, but upon the prominent characteristics of the period.”³³ Gundry concludes that the church will be guarded and preserved during God’s testing of earth-dwellers during the tribulation, emerging from out of it in the parousia at the close of the hour of testing, the events clustered around Armageddon.³⁴

Gundry’s discussion of Rev 3:10 has produced a number of pretribulational responses.³⁵ Jeffrey Townsend surveys the use of *ek* in classical literature, the LXX, Josephus, and the NT and concludes, in contrast to Gundry, “However, sufficient evidence exists throughout the history of the meaning and usage of *ἐκ* (*ek*) to indicate that this preposition may also denote *a position outside its object with no thought of prior existence within the object or of emergence from the object.*”³⁶

²⁹J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 78-79. Aune concurs, stating, “Unfortunately, both sides of the debate have ignored the fact that the promise made here pertains to Philadelphian Christians *only* and cannot be generalized to include Christians in other churches of Asia, much less all Christians in all places and times” (*Revelation 1–5* 240).

³⁰Thomas remarks, “By means of this call the message to a single congregation is extended to all the churches of Asia and through them, as representatives, to the church throughout the world” (*Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* 150).

³¹Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* 54-61.

³²*Ibid.*, 55-59 [transliteration added].

³³*Ibid.*, 59-60.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 60-61.

³⁵The most significant responses to Gundry on Revelation 3:10 are: Thomas R. Edgar, “Robert H. Gundry and Revelation 3:10,” *Grace Theological Journal* 3 (1982):19-49; John A. Sproule, *In Defense of Pretribulationalism* (Winona Lake, IN.: BMH Books, 1980) 26-30; Jeffrey L. Townsend, “The Rapture in Revelation 3:10,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (1980):252-66, reprinted in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1995) 367-79; Winfrey, “The Great Tribulation: Kept ‘Out’ of ‘Through’?” 3-18.

³⁶Townsend, “The Rapture in Revelation 3:10” 253-59 [transliteration added].

When used with *ἡρεῶ*, “Revelation 3:10 may then be paraphrased, ‘Because you have held fast the word which tells of My perseverance, I also will preserve you in a position outside the hour of testing. . . .’”³⁷ Townsend also counters Gundry’s contention concerning the meaning of ‘the hour.’ He writes:

The preservation promised the Philadelphians is in relation to *a specific period of time*. This is indicated by the inclusion of τῆς [*tēs*, “the”] as an article of previous reference. Jesus is speaking of *the* well-known hour of testing which is a reference to the expected time of trouble, the tribulation period, before the return of Messiah (Deut. 4:26-32; Isa. 13:6-13; 17:4-11; Jer. 30:4-11; Ezek. 20:33-38; Dan. 9:27; 12:1; Zech. 14:1-4; Matt. 24:9-31). This period is graphically portrayed in Revelation 6–18 (cf. “the great tribulation,” 7:14; and “the hour of His judgment,” 14:7).³⁸

Townsend concludes that although 3:10 describes the result of the rapture and not the rapture itself, the promise to the church to be kept in a position outside of the tribulation establishes the pretribulation rapture as the most logical deduction from this verse.³⁹

John Sproule also interacts with Gundry’s arguments concerning Rev 3:10. He has pertinent observations concerning Gundry’s view of the church’s preservation in the tribulation:

[I]f Gundry’s view of Revelation 3:10 is correct, then one is left with the colossal problem of reconciling the fact that multitudes of believers will die under the fierce persecution of the Antichrist during the Tribulation and yet God supposedly will preserve His people *physically* through the Tribulation. . . . Gundry tries to alleviate the problem of so many believers perishing during the Tribulation by strongly suggesting that the “hour of testing” referred to in Revelation 3:10 occurs as the “last crisis at the close of the Tribulation” (pp. 48, 61) and that it will affect only wicked *earth-dwellers* at that time since the church will be removed by rapture (τῆρησω ἐκ [*tērēsō ek*]) just prior to this moment (sometime during the initial stage of the bowl judgments). This only compounds his problem, if he sticks by his definition of ἐκ [*ek*]. Since he insists that ἐκ [*ek*] in Revelation 3:10 must be “out from within,” then, for the promise to the church in Revelation 3:10 to hold true, the church will *have* to be *within* that “hour of testing” (*divine* wrath, according to Gundry) before they can be rescued “out from within” it.⁴⁰

Winfrey’s objective is to compare Rev 3:10 with John 17:15, the two NT passages that use the phrase *ἡρεῶ ek*, and to demonstrate that it implies previous

³⁷Ibid., 259.

³⁸Ibid., 259-60. Posttribulationist George Ladd concurs: “Here is a distinct eschatological reference to the ‘messianic woes’ which are to precede the return of the Lord. . . . This period is referred to elsewhere in the Bible in Dan. 12:2; Mark 13:14 and parallels; II Thess. 2:1-12” (*A Commentary on the Revelation of John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972] 62).

³⁹Townsend, “The Rapture in Revelation 3:10” 262-63.

⁴⁰Sproule, *In Defense of Pretribulationism* 29-30 [transliteration added].

existence outside the specified sphere in both passages. John 17:15 reads, "I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one." Winfrey compares John 17:15 with John 17:11b-12a. In the latter verses, Jesus asks the Father, "Keep them [the disciples] in Thy name" and affirms "While I was with them, I was keeping them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me." There is a parallelism between "in Thy name" (17:11) and "from the evil one" (17:15). These two expressions describe spheres of power which are mutually exclusive. The disciples are in the Father's power even though they remain in the world, which is under Satan's power. Though the disciples are in the world, Jesus prays that they would be preserved in their saved lives and be kept from experiencing eternal perdition (cf. 17:12b). "Keep from the evil one" implies the disciples belong to the Father through their relationship with Jesus and will be preserved from the fate of Judas. Winfrey concludes, "This phrase [*ἔρεθ εκ*] must mean preservation *outside* the evil one's power in John 17:15 and preservation *outside* the hour of temptation in Rev 3:10."⁴¹

Thomas Edgar interacts with Gundry's definition of *τηρέω* (*ἔρεθ*) and his contention the preposition *ἀπό* (*apo*, "from, away from, out of") would be more appropriate for a pretribulational view of Rev 3:10. Edgar observes that Gundry has committed the grammatical impossibility of separating the verb and the prepositions into two separate acts. Gundry claims that the verb means "protection *within* a sphere of danger" and the preposition means "emergence *from* within." In this way, Gundry arrives at his conclusion that *ἔρεθ εκ* refers to protection through most of the Tribulation with emission near the end of the Tribulation. But this gives the impossible meaning of "I will keep you in out." However, the verb and its accompanying prepositional phrase are to be viewed as one action. The verb simply means "to keep or guard" with the preposition indicating the direction, location, or sphere of the keeping. In 3:10, *ἔρεθ εκ* simply means "keep from."⁴² Additionally, Edgar analyzes the preposition *εκ*. Of its 923 NT uses, the primary stress of the preposition is "away from" or "from." Even though this usage overlaps *apo*, John prefers *εκ* in his writings over *apo*. Thus, *εκ* is the preposition the reader would expect John to use in 3:10 to express "I will keep you away from the hour of trial."⁴³

In conclusion, pretribulational writers have presented both a sound argument that their understanding of Rev 3:10-11 is the most probable and enough rebuttal arguments to opposing writers to give a high probability that a pretribulational rapture is implied by John.⁴⁴ However, although John affirms the *what*—the church will be kept out of the tribulation by the coming of Christ, he does not explicitly state the *how*—through the event of the rapture. Thus, if there is

⁴¹Winfrey, "The Great Tribulation: Kept 'Out of' or 'Through'?" 5-10.

⁴²Edgar, "Robert H. Gundry and Revelation 3:10" 22-26.

⁴³Ibid., 26-46.

⁴⁴An excellent presentation of the pretribulational exegesis of Revelation 3:10-11 is found in Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* 283-91.

another clear passage in the book of Revelation that speaks of the event of the rapture, it might call into question the *when* of the rapture that seems to be implied in 3:10-11. Therefore, before returning to see if near and far context support the pretribulational understanding of these verses, a survey of other proposed “rapture” passages continues.

Revelation 4:1-2

Some pretribulationalists argue that Revelation 4:1-2 refers to the event of the rapture. The biblical text states, “After these things I looked and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.’ Immediately I was in the spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.”

The Proposal. The first use of “after these things” refers to this event as being after the church age. The mention of heaven, a voice, and a trumpet (cf. 1 Thess 4:13-18) with the command to “come up here [to heaven]” and John’s entrance into heaven points to this event being the rapture.⁴⁵ Thus the rapture is between the end of the church age and the beginning of the tribulation.⁴⁶

Evaluation. The evidence points to this being a statement of John’s personal experience in the first century and not the church’s future experience. The expression “after these things” marks the beginning of a new vision for John (cf. 7:9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1).⁴⁷ According to 1:10, the first voice like a trumpet that John heard was the voice of Jesus Himself (1:12-16); therefore, the voice referred to here is that of Jesus, not that of the archangel at the rapture. John is summoned by Jesus to heaven to receive revelation of future events. This occurs “in the spirit”; John is transported spiritually to heaven while his body remains on Patmos.⁴⁸ Tenney cogently observes, “There is no convincing reason why the seer’s being ‘in the Spirit’ and being called to heaven typifies the rapture of the church any more than his being taken into the wilderness to view Babylon [17:3] indicates that the church

⁴⁵J. A. Seiss writes, “That door opened in heaven is the door of ascension of the saints. That trumpet voice is the same which Paul describes as recalling the sleepers in Jesus. . . . And that ‘COME UP HITHER’ is for everyone in John’s estate” (*The Apocalypse* [reprint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1950] 96).

⁴⁶John F. Walvoord states, “Though there is no authority for connecting the rapture with this expression [‘come up hither’], there does seem to be a typical representation of the order of events, namely, the church age first, then the rapture, then the church in heaven” (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ* [Chicago: Moody, 1966] 103).

⁴⁷Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* 333.

⁴⁸See Thomas (*ibid.*) for a thorough exegesis of 4:1-2 (333-41); he specifically counters those who refer these verses to the rapture (336-37).

is there in exile.”⁴⁹

Revelation 4:4; 5:9-10

Revelation 4:4 gives the first mention of the twenty-four elders: “And around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns upon their heads.” These elders are also mentioned in 4:10; 5:5, 6, 8, 11, 14; 7:11, 13; 11:16; 14:3; and 19:4. Many pretribulation writers have argued that their presence in heaven during the tribulation is proof that the rapture has already taken place.⁵⁰

The Proposal. “The twenty-four elders represent the saints of this age, the church, resurrected and translated into the heavenlies.”⁵¹ Beechick presents a four-step argument on why the twenty-four elders prove a pretribulation rapture. First, the elders must be men because in the Bible only men are elders, sit on thrones (except for God and Satan), wear white raiment, and wear the crowns of victory. Second, the elders are wearing the crowns of victory on their heads. Third, the time for men to receive these crowns is at the coming of Christ, not before (2 Tim 4:8; 1 Pet 5:4). Fourth, if men’s crowns are received at the second coming of Christ [points one to three above] and if these twenty-four elders are men wearing crowns, then there must have been a coming of Christ previous to this. If all these points are correct, the rapture must be pretribulation.⁵²

Evaluation. Three problems arise with the proposal that the mention of the elders proves the pretribulation rapture. First, many have attempted to identify the twenty-four elders of Revelation, but no solution has found complete acceptance.⁵³

⁴⁹Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 141.

⁵⁰Charles Caldwell Ryrie states, “Most other premillennial writers understand them to be twenty-four redeemed human beings around the throne who, though individuals, represent all the redeemed. . . . By either interpretation [they represent Israel and the church saints or the church saints alone] the church is included and is thus in heaven before the tribulation begins” (*Revelation*. Everyman’s Bible Commentary [Chicago: Moody, 1968] 35-36).

⁵¹Pentecost, *Things to Come* 255. Pentecost articulates seven reasons why these elders represent the church (253-58): 1. the number twenty-four represents the entire priesthood (1 Chron 24:1-4, 19), and the church is the only body that could fulfill the priestly function before the tribulation because OT and tribulation saints must wait until the millennium for the realization of their priestly function; 2. the elders sit on thrones and the church has been promised this position (Matt 19:28; Rev 3:21); 3. their white raiment suggests the imputed righteousness of the believer (Rev 3:4-5); 4. the victor’s crowns (*stephanos*) assume that the elders have known conflict, sin, pardon, and victory; 5. their worship of God because of His acts of creation (Rev 4:11), redemption (Rev 5:9), judgment (Rev 19:2), and reigning (Rev 11:17) suggest the elders represent the church; 6. the elders have an intimate knowledge of the program of God (Rev 5:5; 7:13-14; cf. John 15:15); 7. they are associated with Christ in a priestly ministry (Rev 5:8).

⁵²Beechick, *The Pretribulation Rapture* 174-77.

⁵³See Aune, *Revelation 1-5* 287-92; Beale, *The Book of Revelation* 322-26; Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* 344-49.

Good reasons exist to demonstrate that the elders are a special class of angels rather than men. The elders are always grouped with angels in Revelation; in 7:14 one of the elders even functions as an agent of revelation as angels do throughout the book (cf. 1:1; 17:3; 22:6). Also, white apparel is a characteristic of angels (cf. Matt 28:3; John 20:12; Acts 1:10). Further, the crown (*στέφανος*, *stephanos*) had a variety of uses in the ancient world besides being a victor's crown.⁵⁴

Second, many of the commentators who argue that the elders are men see them as representative of both Israel and the church.⁵⁵ If OT saints are not resurrected until the end of the tribulation period (Dan 12:1-2), then NT saints may be resurrected at that time also. The elders represent non-resurrected believers already in the presence of God according to this viewpoint. Third, even if the elders represent the church alone, the text does not specifically mention the rapture as the means of their heavenly arrival. Again, they may only represent non-resurrected Christians who have died and are then in the presence of God. In short, the mention of the twenty-four elders in the book of Revelation does not prove the pretribulation rapture.

Revelation 6:2

A final proposal from a pretribulationist author concerns Revelation 6:2, "And I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him; and he went out conquering, and to conquer."

The Proposal. Zane Hodges argues that the rider on the white horse in 6:2 is the same individual as the rider on a white horse in 19:11-16, Jesus Christ. He proposes that 6:2 is a description of Christ's coming for His church:

Yet another illuminating point, however, is to be gleaned from the aura of mystery which surrounds the first horseman of Revelation 6, but which is dispelled in resplendent glory in Revelation 19. It is this: in Revelation 6, the rider issues forth before any of the judgments of the tribulation are presented, whereas in Revelation 19 the rider issues forth after all these judgments have been recorded. Precisely so, the triumphant Christ will ride forth prior to the great tribulation as well as after it. And thus there is suggested in Revelation 6 that initial aspect of the second advent known as the rapture of the church. Indeed, it cannot be doubted that one of the great triumphs of the Lord Jesus will be the moment when His bride—whom He desires ultimately to display to a wondering world—is snatched from a hostile earth and, victorious over her every enemy, is caught up to meet Him in the air. In this light, additional significance attaches to the fact that the rider of Revelation goes forth "conquering." The rapture then would be the very first

⁵⁴Pretribulationist Thomas (*Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary*) argues for the angelic viewpoint (348-49).

⁵⁵Simon J. Kistemaker writes, "The traditional interpretation of the twenty-four elders is that this number is the total of twelve times two, namely, twelve Old Testament patriarchs and twelve New Testament apostles, the representatives of those redeemed by Christ" (*Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001] 187).

of the many triumphs which this horseman sets out to achieve.⁵⁶

Evaluation. There have been many proposals as to who the rider on the white horse in 6:2 is.⁵⁷ The main reason some have argued for Christ is the fact that this anonymous horseman rides a white horse which is specifically what Christ rides at His return to the earth in 19:11. However, there are distinct contrasts between the two horsemen. The first horseman is anonymous, but the second is called “Faithful and True”; the first has a crown (στέφανος, *stephanos*), but the second has many diadems (διαδήματα, *diadēmata*) (19:12); the first comes alone, but the second is accompanied by the armies of heaven (19:14); the first carries a bow, but the second has a sharp sword (19:15); and the first is followed by war, famine, and death, but the second defeats His enemies and ushers in the millennium (19:17–20:6). Further, a distinct parallelism exists between the four horsemen of Rev 6:2-8 and the future conditions predicted by Christ in Matt 24:5-11; Mark 13:6-8; and Luke 21:8-11, as the chart below illustrates:⁵⁸

<i>Conditions</i>	Revelation 6	Matthew 24	Mark 13	Luke 21
False Messiahs	2	5, 11	6	8
Wars	4	6-7	7	9
Famines	5-6, 8	7	8	10
Pestilences	8			11

As one can observe, the first horseman of Revelation parallels the false messiahs predicted by Jesus Christ. Thus the first horseman must represent the Antichrist or a movement that he will lead. Revelation 6:2 is not a description of the rapture.

Revelation 7:9-17

Pre-wrath advocates propose that Rev 7:9-10a— “After these things, I looked, and a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and people and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice . . .”—speaks of those raptured by Christ. Those advocates divide Daniel’s seventieth week (Dan 9:27) into three periods: the first three and a half years are “The Beginning of Sorrows” (cf. Matt 24:8), followed by “The Great Tribulation” which occurs after “The Abomination of Desolation” (cf. Matt 24:14, 21), which is less than three and a half years because it is cut short (cf. Matt 24:22),

⁵⁶Zane C. Hodges, “The First Horseman of the Apocalypse,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119 (1962):330.

⁵⁷Aune, *Revelation 6-16* 393-95; Beale, *The Book of Revelation* 375-78; Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* 419-24; Daniel K. K. Wong, “The First Horseman of Revelation 6,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (1996):212-26.

⁵⁸The chart is based on John McLean, “Chronology and Sequential Structure of John’s Revelation,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, eds. Ice and Demy 326.

followed by the pouring out of God's wrath in "The Day of the Lord" at the end of the final three and a half years.⁵⁹

The Proposal. They place the rapture of the church between "The Great Tribulation" and "The Day of the Lord," thus locating it before the pouring out of God's wrath, a pre-wrath rapture. They argue that the great multitude described in Rev 7:9-17 is the raptured church.⁶⁰ Rosenthal cites four reasons why the great multitude of Revelation 7 is a different group from the faithful martyrs seen in heaven in Revelation 6 as having been slain by the Antichrist. First, they are too numerous and international to have become believers during the relatively short period of Daniel's seventieth week. Second, the martyrs are souls under the altar asking God to avenge their blood (6:9-10); in contrast, the multitude is praising God for salvation (7:10). Third, the martyrs are described as "souls," whereas the multitude is seen as "clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands" (7:9). The martyrs are *souls*—the multitude has *bodies*. Fourth, in Revelation 6 John recognizes the martyrs, but in Revelation 7 he does not recognize who the multitude is, showing they are a different group.⁶¹ He concludes, "This great multitude, innumerable, universal, and suddenly appearing in heaven with white robes (purified) and palm branches (triumphant), is the raptured church."⁶²

Evaluation. The interpretation of the great multitude has been varied, but 7:14 clearly states that these believers came out of "the great tribulation."⁶³ They do not represent all the believers of the church age. Renald Showers shows that there are two problems with equating the great multitude with the raptured church:

1. One of the twenty-four elders indicated that the people who make up the great multitude come out of the Great Tribulation (Rev. 7:13-14). This means that all the people who make up the great multitude will be on earth during the Great Tribulation, making it a partial rapture of the church. . . . By contrast, the Bible indicates that all church saints will be raptured together as one body at the same time (1 Thess. 4:13-18).
2. The Greek present tense of the main verb in the elder's statement indicates that the

⁵⁹Rosenthal, *The Pre-wrath Rapture of the Church* 103-13.

⁶⁰Ibid. 179-86; Robert Van Kampen, *The Sign* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1993) 305-18.

⁶¹Rosenthal, *The Pre-wrath Rapture of the Church* 183-84.

⁶²Ibid., 184-85.

⁶³Beale equates the great multitude of 7:9-17 with the 144,000 of 7:1-8 and as the same group referred to in 5:9, the innumerable true Israelite descendants of Abraham (*The Book of Revelation* 426-31). Aune distinguishes the great multitude and the 144,000, though the larger group probably includes the smaller group, and argues that the multitude are Christians who suffer martyrdom during the eschatological tribulation (*Revelation 6-16* 466-67, 480). Thomas also distinguishes the two groups of Revelation 7, but concludes that the multitude is tribulation saints who die either natural or violent deaths (*Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* 484-85).

people who make up the great multitude do not come out of the Great Tribulation at the same time, but one by one, continuously, throughout the course of the Great Tribulation, apparently through death. This again contrasts with the manner in which the church will be raptured from the earth.⁶⁴

Revelation 11:3-12

Some midtribulationists have argued that Rev 11:11-12 describes the rapture. In recounting the activities of the two witnesses, John writes, “And after the three days and a half the breath of God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were beholding them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here.’ And they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies beheld them.”

The Proposal. The two witnesses introduced in 11:3 are identified as representing the church.⁶⁵ Thus, the experience of the witnesses in Revelation is symbolic of the church. The church will testify to Christ, suffer persecution and supposed defeat, only to be resurrected from the dead when a voice from heaven will call and she will go up in the cloud.⁶⁶ The terms “dead,” “voice,” and “cloud” parallel 1 Thess 4:16-17, and thus refer to the rapture.

Evaluation. The central issue with the two witnesses is whether they are two specific individuals or symbolic of a group.⁶⁷ The best interpretation views them as two individuals, because their activities mirror those of Elijah (“power to shut up the sky” [11:6; cf. 1 Kgs 17:1]) and Moses (“power to turn the water into blood and to smite the earth with every plague” [11:6; cf. Exod 7:14-21; 9:14; 11:10]), and because they are verbally linked with Joshua and Zerubbabel (11:4; cf. Zech 4:2, 3, 11-14). Therefore they do not symbolically represent the church. Further, their ascension into heaven (11:12) is modeled on ascensions of Elijah (2

⁶⁴Renald E. Showers, “The Prewrath Rapture,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996) 357. See also Showers, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture View: An Examination and Critique* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001) 139-51.

⁶⁵Mounce remarks, “It is more likely, however, that they are not two individuals but a symbol of the witnessing church in the last tumultuous days before the end of the age” (*The Book of Revelation* 217).

⁶⁶Mounce states, “The triumph of the witnesses is no secret rapture; it is openly visible to all (cf. Matt. 24:27; 1 Thess. 4:17)” (*ibid.*, 223). Buswell views the two witnesses as individuals. However, he sees their midtribulation rapture occurring at the same time as that of the church. He writes, “It is my opinion that in the coming to life and Rapture of the two witness (Rev. 11:11ff.) we have an exact synchronization of events. The two witnesses are caught up into heaven ‘in the cloud’ at the same moment that the elect of God are caught up together in clouds to the meeting of the Lord in the air (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)” (*A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* 2:456).

⁶⁷Aune (*Revelation 6-16* 610-11, 631-32) and Beale (*The Book of Revelation* 572-75) interpret the two witnesses as representative of the whole community of faith, the witnessing church of the last days. However, Thomas (*Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* 86-89) avers that they are two individuals, probably Moses and Elijah.

Kgs 2:11) and Jesus (Acts 1:9) when eyewitnesses saw them go up into a cloud. By contrast, the rapture of believers will apparently happen instantaneously, not gradually as here (cf. 1 Cor 15:51-52).

Revelation 11:15-19

Some, especially midtribulationists, suppose the rapture to coincide with the sound of the last trumpet spoken of in Rev 11:15: “And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever.’”

The Proposal. Buswell argues for the blowing of the trumpet of Revelation 11:15 as heralding the rapture:

- (1) The seventh trumpet announces the time of rewards for the righteous dead (Revelation 11:18).
- (2) The time of the rewards for the righteous dead is “at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14). . . .
- (3) The resurrection of the righteous takes place at the same moment, “twinkling of an eye,” at which the saints who are alive when Christ comes again will be changed and made immortal (I Corinthians 15:52).
- (4) This same moment is predicted as occurring “at the last trumpet” (I Corinthians 15:52).
- (5) The moment of the resurrection of the righteous, of rewards for the righteous dead, of the change to immortality of the living saints, of the last trumpet is the moment of the rapture of the saints who will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (I Thessalonians 4:13-18).⁶⁸

Evaluation. The majority of commentators do not correlate the seventh trumpet of Rev 11:15 with 1 Cor 15:52.⁶⁹ The last trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15 is the final summons to the church. As such it correlates to the trumpet of God at the rapture of the church (1 Thess 4:16). In contrast, the trumpet in Revelation 11 is the seventh sounded by an angel as the last of seven judgments for which the angels blow trumpets. It is referred to by John as the third “woe” (11:14), the final judgments of God which will lead to establishment of Christ’s kingdom (11:15b-18). This trumpet in Revelation is a harbinger of God’s final wrath upon the world, not a summons to God’s resurrection blessing for His church as in 1 Corinthians. Further, neither of these trumpets is the last one, only the last in a given series, because another trumpet will sound at the second coming of Christ to regather Israel (Matt 24:31; cf. Isa 27:13). Thus the trumpet of Rev 11:15 is not the herald of the

⁶⁸Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* 2:458-59.

⁶⁹Aune (*Revelation 6-16* 637-38) and Beale (*The Book of Revelation* 611) do not mention 1 Cor 15:52 in their discussions of the last trumpet in Rev 11:15. Thomas specifically notes that they are not the same (*Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* 104).

church's rapture.⁷⁰

Revelation 12:5

Svigel, who offers no conclusion as to when the rapture will take place, argues that the only explicit reference to the rapture of the church in the book of Revelation is 12:5.⁷¹ The verse states, "And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne."

The Proposal. On the basis of genre, context, and lexical analysis, Svigel presents his case for identifying the rapture with the catching up of the male child in 12:5. The genre of the book of Revelation is "apocalyptic/prophetic" which communicates its message through images, referents, and allusions that the interpreter must identify.⁷² The three symbolic personages of Rev 12:1-6 are the woman who symbolizes the true Israel of faith of the OT and NT, the dragon who symbolizes both the world system throughout history and the ruler of that system, Satan, and the male child who symbolizes Jesus Christ and His corporate body, the church (based on the allusion to Isa 66:7-8).⁷³ Lexical analysis demonstrates that ἀρπάζω (*harpazō*, "snatch away") is used thirty-nine times in the LXX and fourteen times in the NT, always with the idea of sudden, unexpected removal. It is the verb used by Paul in 1 Thess 4:17 for the rapture of the church. The verb occurs only in Rev in 12:5. In the NT it never refers to the ascension of Christ.⁷⁴ Svigel concludes, "The 'snatching up' of the male child, then, would be equated with the catching up of the church described in 1 Thess. 4:17."⁷⁵

Evaluation. Svigel himself observes that commentators on Revelation have either overlooked or rejected this interpretation of 12:5.⁷⁶ The traditional interpretation of the male child throughout the history of the church has been messianic, it refers to Jesus Christ. John clearly states that the woman's son, a male, is about to fulfill the messianic promise of Ps 2:8-9. Within the context of the book of Revelation, this can refer only to Jesus Christ (cf. 19:15). The "snatching away" of 12:5 refers to the ascension of Christ into heaven where He escaped Satan's

⁷⁰For a more extensive discussion on identity of the trumpets in 1 Corinthians 15 and Revelation 11, see Pentecost, *Things to Come* 188-92, and Stanton, *Kept from the Hour* 192-98.

⁷¹Svigel, "The Apocalypse of John and the Rapture of the Church: A Reevaluation" 53-74.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 54-56.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 56-67.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 62-65.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 67.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 53. Aune (*Revelation 6-16* 687-90), with reservations; Beale, (*The Book of Revelation* 639-42); and Thomas (*Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* 125-26) assert that the male child is Jesus Christ.

hostility until the time He will return to the earth to establish God's Kingdom. Thus 12:5 is not a statement of the rapture of the church.

Revelation 14:14-16

Midtribulationist Gleason Archer, Jr., and posttribulationist Rober Gundry identify Rev 14:14-16 as the passage in the book most likely to refer to the rapture.⁷⁷ The biblical text reads, "And I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head, and a sharp sickle in His hand. And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, 'Put in your sickle and reap, because the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.' And He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth; and the earth was reaped." This precedes a second gathering of the earth described in 14:17-20 which is clearly identified with the wrath of God (14:19). This second harvest is clearly one of judgment.

The Proposal.

Gundry clearly states the argument:

In 14:14-20 two harvests are reaped, the first by one like a son of man on whose head rests a golden crown, the second by an angel who casts his harvest into the winepress of God's wrath. The first harvest (vv. 14-16) is best taken as symbolic of the rapture. For the phrase "one like a son of man" identifies both the reaper of the first harvest and, in John's first vision, Christ Himself (1:13; cf. John 5:27). Immediately we think of "the son of man coming on the clouds of the sky" (Matt. 24:30) and Paul's comparison of the resurrection and translation of Christians to a harvest (1 Corinthians 15:13, 35ff.). The "white cloud" on which sits the reaper in John's vision corresponds to the clouds associated with the Parousia in Matthew 24:30; Acts 1:9-11; and 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The special dignity indicated by the golden crown also points to the Lord.⁷⁸

Evaluation. The identification of the reaper of 14:14-16 as Christ is correct (cf. Dan 7:13; Rev 1:13).⁷⁹ However, based on clear OT allusions, the reaping must be one of judgment (Isa 17:5; 18:4-5; 24:13; Jer 51:33; Hos 6:11; Joel 3:13; Mic 4:12-13).⁸⁰ The first harvest (Rev 14:14-16) gives the general view of Christ's judgment of the earth, while the second harvest (Rev 14:17-20) concentrates particularly on that part of humanity thrown into the great winepress of God's wrath. Because Rev 14:14-16 gives a picture of Christ's judgment, it is not symbolic of the

⁷⁷Gleason L. Archer, Jr., "The Case for the Mid-seven tieth-week Rapture Position," in *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-tribulation* 142-43; Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* 83-84.

⁷⁸Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* 83-84.

⁷⁹Beale, *The Book of Revelation* 770-72; Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* 218. Aune argues that "one like a son of man" is an angel (*Revelation 6-16* 800-801).

⁸⁰Aune, *Revelation 6-16* 801-3, 839-45; Beale, *The Book of Revelation* 772-73; Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* 219-21.

rapture.

Revelation 20:4

The final passage in the book of Revelation where the rapture is believed to be found is 20:4, “And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” According to most posttribulationists, this verse includes the rapture.

The Proposal. In 20:4 John describes the “first resurrection” (20:5). Several reasons demonstrate that this resurrection will include all believers. First, verse 4 mentions at least two groups of believers. One group includes the believers who sit on thrones judging; the other group includes the “tribulation” saints who were martyred and did not worship the beast. Second, these believers who will be resurrected “will be priests to God and of Christ and will reign with Him” (20:6). Revelation 5:9-10 refers to these priests as coming from “every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” Thus the church must be included in this group. Third, John describes only two resurrections in 20:5. The “first resurrection” must have temporal force since it is contrasted with a “second.” There can be no resurrection before this first one in 20:4. These two resurrections must include all the dead, with believers participating in the first. Fourth, John would be expected to include the resurrection of believers in his portrait of the end times. “For these reasons, it is probable that Revelation 20:4 depicts the resurrection of *all* the righteous dead—including church saints. Since the Rapture occurs at the same time as this resurrection, and the first resurrection is clearly posttribulationist, the Rapture must be considered posttribulationist.”⁸¹

Evaluation. Three problems arise when Rev 20:4 is viewed as depicting the rapture. First, although John speaks in this verse of resurrection, “they came to life,” he does not mention the rapture, the “snatching away” of church saints. The posttribulationist can only argue the probability of the rapture in 20:4 based upon his understanding of other biblical texts. Second, beginning in 19:11, John narrates an apparent sequence of events associated with the second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth and its effects. These progressive scenes in this sequence are marked off by the statement of John “I saw” (19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11, 12). Based on 1 Thess 4:13-18, the posttribulationist expectation would be that the rapture would be simultaneous with the return of Christ as recorded in 19:11-16. If the rapture is

⁸¹Moo, “The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position” 200-201. See the similar interpretation in Ladd (*A Commentary on the Revelation of John* 263-68), but without the specific mention of the rapture of the church.

associated with 20:4, it will occur after the second coming of Christ to the earth.⁸² Third, the identity of the saints sitting on the thrones and judging in 20:4a has been a point of discussion among commentators on the book.⁸³ They are definitely a different group from the tribulation saints who will be resurrected in 20:4b. Within the immediate context the other group associated with Christ is “the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean” who will follow Christ to earth on white horses (Rev 19:14).⁸⁴ These saints must have been resurrected by rapture before the events of 20:4. Thus the “first resurrection” must come in phases, and is not associated with the events recorded in 20:4 only.

Conclusion

An evaluation of the different proposals set forth concerning where the rapture is referred to in the book of Revelation has led to the conclusion that there is no explicit mention of the rapture in the book, at least not in the Pauline terminology (*harpazō*, 1 Thess. 4:17). The most probable passage referring to the rapture is Rev 3:10-11, which is Jesus’ affirmation through John that the church will be kept out of the tribulation by the coming of Christ. A brief exposition of Rev 3:7-13 is in order to see if the eschatological scheme of John corresponds to that of the apostle Paul.

An Exposition of Rev 3:7-13

These verses comprise the sixth of seven messages communicated by Jesus Christ to select churches in the Roman province of Asia, the churches that were the immediate addressees of the book of Revelation. Christ’s message here gives assurances based on certain eschatological realities.⁸⁵

The Address of Jesus Christ (3:7a)

The message is addressed by Jesus Christ to the human messenger of the local church in the city of Philadelphia. It is the responsibility of this messenger, in some way controlled by Christ (cf. 1:20), to communicate accurately what Christ had led the apostle John to write. The messenger is possibly the reader of the contents of the book to the congregation (cf. 1:3).

⁸²Walvoord remarks, “One of the most damaging portions of Scripture on the posttribulation Rapture is the fact that the resurrection in Revelation 20:4-5 occurs, not at the time of the second coming of Christ, but probably some days thereafter” (*The Rapture Question: Revised and Enlarged Edition* 267).

⁸³Aune, *Revelation 17-22* 1084-85; Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* 413-14.

⁸⁴Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* 414; Svigel, “The Apocalypse of John and the Rapture of the Church: A Reevaluation” 51-53.

⁸⁵Because of the limited scope of this article, only the interpretive conclusions reached by the author will be presented here. For the exegetical foundation of these conclusions, consult Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* 269-94.

The Attributes of Jesus Christ (3:7b)

Jesus begins, as in each of the seven messages, by affirming characteristics about Himself which are especially pertinent to the particular church being addressed. To the Philadelphian church He declares four attributes that belong to Him. First, He is the holy one, the uniquely set apart one who is deity. He is truly Israel's God, even though the Jews of Philadelphia rejected His messianic claims (cf. 3:9). Second, He is the true One. As deity, His words are completely reliable. What He assures the church will certainly come to pass. Third, He has the key of David. Christ is the One who will exercise authority over the Davidic Kingdom when it is established on the earth in the future (cf. Isa 22:22). Fourth, He is the One who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens. He has the authority and power to admit or exclude from David's future kingdom. Jesus alone will determine who enters the future millennial Kingdom.

The Appraisal of Jesus Christ (3:8a, c)

Jesus knows the deeds of the church. He is aware that the church has limited influence in the city because of their numerical smallness. However, in the past, the church had been faithful to proclaim the gospel and to affirm that Jesus is the Messiah, even in the face of outward Jewish antagonism.

The Assurances of Jesus Christ (3:8b, 9-12)

Because of the past faithfulness of the Philadelphian church, and in anticipation of their future faithfulness, Jesus gives eschatological assurances to these believers.

The Certain Entrance into the Davidic Kingdom (3:8b). The One who has authority over David's Kingdom assures the church that He has put an open door before them that no one, including their Jewish opponents, can shut. Jesus, and not the Jews, determines that they will enter the future millennial Kingdom, and the Philadelphian believers will certainly enter (cf. 19:14; 20:4a). Paul also anticipates Christ's future authority over an earthly kingdom (1 Cor 15:25) in which Christian believers will participate (1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 1:5).

The Present Conversion of Some Jews to Jesus Christ (3:9a). Even though the Jews who make up the synagogue at Philadelphia claim to be God's people, in reality they are lying because they are doing the deeds inspired by Satan. Nevertheless, some of the presently unbelieving and antagonistic Jews in the near future will be converted to follow Jesus as Messiah because of the faithful presentation of the gospel. Paul also speaks of the faithful remnant of Jewish believers during this age (Rom 11:5)

The Future Conversion of All Israel to Jesus Christ (3:9b). Ultimately, in the future Kingdom, repentant Israel will worship Jesus as the Messiah. Though the Jews presently scoff at the claim that Christ loves the church, that attitude will change when Israel repents. Paul too looked forward to the future salvation of Israel

(Rom 11:26).

The Future Keeping of Christians from the ‘Tribulation’ Period (3:10).

Because the church had in the past exhibited the same kind of endurance on behalf of the truth of God that Christ displayed while on earth, Christ promised to keep them out of the time when God would put earth dwellers to the test, a test to reveal their unrepentant hearts (9:20-21). This time of testing is about to happen at any moment and will engulf the whole world. Paul also encourages believers with the assurance that they would not experience the coming wrath of God (1 Thess 1:10, 5:9).

The Imminent Future Return of Jesus Christ (3:11). The event that would keep the church out of the hour of testing is the return of Christ for His church. Christ could return suddenly and unexpectedly (cf. 22:7, 12, 20). The near return of Christ means the believers need to continue to be steadfast in their devotion to Christ until He returns. Their steadfastness will assure them of their reward of life (2:10) when He returns for them. Paul reveals that the coming of Christ for His church will take place at the rapture (1 Thess 4:17).

The Future Reward for the Christians (3:12). These Philadelphian Christians should look forward to an eternally secure relationship with God and a secure identity with God, the New Jerusalem, and Jesus Christ. These assurances will be realized in the eternal state (21:1–22:5). Paul can also speak of a future delivering up of Christ’s Kingdom to the Father and the resultant eternal state (1 Cor 15:24).

The Admonition of Jesus Christ (3:13)

What the Spirit says to the church at Philadelphia is applicable to every church throughout the church age.

Therefore, a correlation exists between the eschatologies of Paul and John. Both write of the present conversion of a Jewish remnant to Christ, the future deliverance of the church from the tribulation period by the return of Christ for His church, the future salvation of ethnic Israel, the participation of the church in the millennial Kingdom of Christ, and the ultimate reward for Christians in the eternal state. In Rev 3:10-11, John reveals an eschatological *what*—the church will be kept out of the tribulation by the coming of Christ for His church. In 1 Thess 4:13-18, Paul reveals the *how*—through such an event as the rapture. Correlating John and Paul gives the *when*—the rapture of the church will be before the tribulation.