

THE PAROUSÍA OF CHRIST: THE BELIEVER'S BLESSED HOPE

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Introduction

Ever since the God-Man Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, the Church has *eagerly* awaited her Lord's promised return. Surely, all New Covenant believers, regardless of their end-time beliefs, will readily and heartily affirm the cosmic significance and eschatological importance of Christ's *parousía*. As a result, it is *imperative* that believing Christians possess a *biblically accurate* understanding of their Lord's return. However, what does the Bible teach regarding the *parousía* of Jesus Christ? Does it teach a one-stage return? Or does it teach a two-stage *parousía* with a pretribulation rapture of the Church followed by the Lord's Second Coming? Biblical answers to these questions can be found through the contextual analysis of six eschatological terms that relate to Christ's return. The purpose of this paper is to *biblically* and *objectively* investigate what the Bible teaches regarding Christ's *parousía*.

By *concisely* and *contextually* analyzing six terms which relate to the Lord's return, this paper will attempt to determine and distill the *biblical* teaching regarding Christ's *parousía*. The first section will feature a contextual word study of the Greek word *parousía*, while the second segment will analyze the term *Day of the Lord*. The third section will examine the Greek word *apokalypsis*, followed by a contextual analysis of the term *Day of Christ*. The final two sections will respectively investigate the Greek words *epiphaneia* and *sunteleia*.

Parousía

Parousía (παρουσία) is the Greek word that the New Testament authors used most often to describe Christ's return.² This particular word possesses two primary meanings: "the state of being present at a place, *presence*" and "arrival as the first stage in presence, *coming, advent*."³ Whenever *parousía* occurs in conjunction with the Lord's return, it carries the *latter* of the two meanings. This section features a concise analysis of *five* passages of Scripture in which the word *parousía* occurs: Matthew 24, 1 Corinthians 15, 2 Peter 3, 2 Thessalonians, and 1 Thessalonians. Examining how this particular word functions in each of these passages will certainly aid in determining the biblical teaching regarding Christ's return.

Matthew 24

The Greek word *parousía* occurs no less than four times in the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24-25), which is Christ's teaching regarding His Second Coming. The discourse begins in Matthew 24:3 with

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²The Greek word *parousía* describes the Lord's return in the follow passages: Matthew 24:3, 24:27, 24:37, 24:39; 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 3:13, 4:15, 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2:8; James 5:7-8; 2 Peter 1:16, 3:4, 3:12; 1 John 2:28.

³Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. and trans. William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick William Danker [BAGD], 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 780.

*two*⁴ questions which the disciples ask the Lord Jesus: “Tell us, when will these things be [referring to Jesus’ prophecy of the Temple’s destruction], and what *will be* the sign of Your coming [*tēs sēs parousía*], and of the end of the age?”⁵ In verses 27-31, Christ discusses the timing and nature of His *parousía*:

²⁷For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall *the coming* [*hē parousía*] *of the Son of Man* be....²⁹But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken,³⁰ and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and *they will see the Son of Man coming* on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.³¹ And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other [**emphasis mine**].

This particular passage highlights *seven* characteristics of Christ’s *parousía*. *First*, when the Lord Jesus compared His coming to lightning flashing from the east to the west (Matt 24:27), He was teaching that His coming will be both *universal* and *unmistakable*. John MacArthur declares that the *parousía*–lightning comparison emphasizes that “Christ’s return will be clearly evident to all, near and far.”⁶ *Second*, Matthew 24:29 clearly teaches that Christ’s *parousía* occurs immediately after the Great Tribulation. *Third*, Matthew 24:29 also declares that a cosmic upheaval will accompany the Lord’s return with the heavens being shaken, the sun and moon being darkened, and the stars falling from the sky! *Fourth*, Matthew 24:30 explicitly mentions the unbelievers who “will mourn” in response to Christ’s *parousía*. *Fifth*, the same verse emphasizes not only that the *parousía* will be visible to all but also that Christ will return with great power and great glory. *Sixth*, a great trumpet is associated with Christ’s return and the gathering of His elect (Matt 24:31). *Seventh*, when Christ’s *parousía* occurs, angels will gather together God’s elect “from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other” (Matt 24:31).

The word *parousía* appears twice in Matthew 24:36-42. Here, Christ declares:

⁴Although most English translations *appear* to record the disciples asking Jesus *three* questions in Matthew 24:3, the rules of Greek grammar allow for only *two* questions. The specific rule of grammar to be remembered in this particular case is the Granville Sharp rule. See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond The Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 270. Daniel Wallace defines this rule with the following words: “In Greek, when two nouns are connected by *καί* and the article precedes only the first noun, there is a close connection between the two. That connection always indicates at least some sort of *unity*. At a higher level, it may connote *equality*. At the highest level it may indicate *identity*. When the construction meets three specific demands, then the two nouns *always* refer to the same person. When the construction does not meet these requirements, the noun may or may not refer to the same person(s) / objects(s).” Later, he continues: “Although Sharp discusses here only personal substantives in the singular, it is not clear from his statement whether he intended to restrict his rule to such. However, a perusal of his monograph reveals that he felt the rule could be applied absolutely only to personal, singular, non-proper nouns.”⁴ Although “coming” and “end of the age” are impersonal nouns, the Granville Sharp rule can and most likely should be applied in this particular case as well. The Greek text from which the phrase “what *will be* the sign of Your coming (*tēs sēs parousía*), and of the end of the age?” is translated is *τί τὸ σημεῖον τῆς σῆς παρουσίας καὶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος* (τί τὸ σημεῖον τῆς σῆς παρουσίας καὶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος). The two singular nouns *parousía* (“coming”) and *συντελείας* (“end”) are linked by the connective conjunction *καί* (“and”) and also share the definite article *tēs* which occurs before the noun *parousía*. As a result, there is a close connection between both “*the* your coming” and “end of the age.” Also, the grammar of Matthew 24:3 indicates that the singular noun *σημεῖον* (“the sign”) refers to both *parousía* (“coming”) and *συντελείας* (“end”). Therefore, it is best to understand “*the* your coming” and “end of the age” as being triggered by the *same* sign and occurring at the *same* time. More will be said about this linkage later. My own literal translation of this portion of Matthew 24:3 reads as follows: “what (will be) *the* sign of *the* your coming and end of the age.”

⁵All of this author’s Bible citations are from the NASB unless otherwise stated.

⁶John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 1173.

³⁶But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. ³⁷For *the coming* [*hē parousía*] *of the Son of Man* will be just like the days of Noah. ³⁸For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall *the coming* [*hē parousía*] *of the Son of Man* be. Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. ⁴¹Two women *will be* grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. ⁴²Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming [**emphasis mine**].

This pericope of verses highlights *two* additional characteristics of Christ's *parousía*. *First*, Christ's return will be both *sudden* and *unexpected*, as *no one*, but God the Father, knows when this blessed event will occur. *Second*, Christ's *parousía* will simultaneously signal the destruction of the wicked and the relief of the righteous. Luke 17:26-29 underscores this second point even more clearly:

And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it shall be also in the days of the Son of Man: ²⁷they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, *until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all*. ²⁸It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; ²⁹*but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all* [**emphasis mine**].

As a result, Christ's *parousía* will be the occasion when the Lord will not only destroy the wicked but also grant relief to His elect.

1 Corinthians 15

Parousía occurs only once in the fifteenth chapter of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians: 1 Corinthians 15:23. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 15:23, MacArthur, a Dispensationalist, writes:

Christ was first, as the firstfruits of the resurrection harvest (vv 20-23a). Because of His Resurrection, "those who are Christ's" will be raised and enter the eternal heavenly state in three stages at Christ's coming (cf. Matt. 24:36, 42, 44, 50; 25:13): (1) those who have come to saving faith from Pentecost to the rapture will be joined by living saints at the Rapture to meet the Lord in the air and ascend to heaven (1 Thess. 4:16, 17); (2) those who come to faith during the Tribulation, with the OT saints as well, will be raised up to reign with Him during the Millennium (Rev. 20:4; cf. Dan. 12:2; cf. Is. 26:19, 20); and (3) those who die during the millennial kingdom may well be instantly transformed at death into their eternal bodies and spirits. The only people left to be raised will be the ungodly and that will occur at the end of the Millennium at the Great White Throne Judgment of God... which will be followed by eternal hell (Rev. 21:8).⁷

In other words, MacArthur teaches a *three-stage parousía* of Christ. Furthermore, he interprets the eschatological event described in 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 as a pretribulation rapture.⁸ Why do many Dispensationalists teach that 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 and other passages describe a pretribulation rapture? John Walvoord, a Dispensationalist, provides the answer:

It is important to realize that the scriptural rapture is totally different from the picture of the second coming as given in Revelation 19:11-16. Here Christ comes back to the earth with the purpose of judging the world and bringing His kingdom to bear upon the earth. He is accompanied by the armies of

⁷Ibid., 1606.

⁸Ibid., 1608-10.

heaven, including the angels and the saints, and the church, which had previously been raptured. They all come to be with Christ during His thousand-year reign on earth. While many questions are left unanswered, the main facts are perfectly clear for anyone who will accept what the Scriptures say. At the time of the Rapture there is no judgment on earth and there is no heavenly host accompanying Christ, for His purpose in Revelation 19, where He comes from heaven to earth, is to bring His judgment and power to bear upon a wicked earth.⁹

In another work, Walvoord states, “In all these major passages on the Rapture, the implication is that the time of trouble follows the Rapture rather than precedes it and that it is totally different from Christ’s second coming.”¹⁰ In other words, any eschatological passage which describes Christ’s return but makes no explicit reference to unbelievers, judgment, torment, punishment, or glory, indicates a pretribulation rapture not the *parousía*. While such reasoning may appear to be built on a solid biblical foundation, it is actually built on multiple **arguments from silence**. *The absence of any explicit reference to those topics does not justify understanding any particular verse as a reference to a pretribulation rapture, because the purpose and context of the author’s discussion can always explain the absence.* For example, the Apostle Paul is addressing a heretical view of the resurrection **among believers** in 1 Corinthians 15. Specifically, he is refuting the false teaching that there is no future bodily resurrection **for believers**. Since the apostle’s primary focus is the resurrection of **believers**, it is not necessary for him to mention the bodily resurrection of the wicked in 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. Any mention of unbelievers, judgment, torment, or punishment would have actually detracted from the flow, purpose, and clarity of his argument.

I believe that the preceding Dispensational views regarding 1 Corinthians 15 are forced on the text and that there is a more accurate way to view Paul’s teaching in the chapter. Understanding the structure of 1 Corinthians 15 is crucial to recognizing that the chapter is indeed a *unified* explanation of *one* general resurrection. The chapter may be summarily outlined in the following manner:

15:1-11	The Centrality of the Resurrection to the Gospel
15:12-19	The Necessity of the Resurrection to the Gospel
15:20-28	<u>The Sequence of the Resurrection:</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Christ the Firstfruits 2. Adam vs. Christ 3. Resurrection occurs at Christ’s coming (<i>parousía</i>) 4. Destruction of Death
15:29	Baptism for the dead ¹¹
15:30-32	Paul’s Persecution: Another Justification for the Resurrection
15:33-34	Apostolic Exhortation
15:35-49	<u>The Resurrection Body</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Earthly perishable body vs. spiritual imperishable body 2. Adam vs. Christ
15:50-58	<u>The Manner of Resurrection</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Resurrection of the Elect 2. Destruction of Death

⁹John F. Walvoord, “Escape from Planet Earth,” in *Foreshocks of the Antichrist*, ed. by William T. James (Eugene: Harvest House, 1997), 371.

¹⁰John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies: 37 Crucial Prophecies that Affect You Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 277.

¹¹It is best to understand that Paul mentions the Corinthian practice of baptism for the dead in order to point out the inconsistency of the Corinthian denial of a future bodily resurrection, not to endorse or condone this practice.

Notice that both the Adam – Christ comparison and the destruction of death are mentioned twice within Paul’s resurrection discourse. Both concepts are mentioned briefly in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; however, each receives greater treatment later in the chapter. For example, the Apostle Paul introduces the typological comparison between Adam and Christ in verses 20-21, and he later expands this concept in verses 45-49. Similarly, he states that death is the last enemy to be destroyed in 1 Corinthians 15:26, while later devoting verses 50-58 to the swallowing up or *destruction* of death. The repetition of these concepts **strongly** implies that Paul is teaching in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 **one** general resurrection when death is swallowed up at the end of the New Covenant age when Christ returns at His Second Coming.¹²

The destruction of Death is highlighted twice in the fifteenth chapter of Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians. The Apostle writes the following in 1 Corinthians 15:22-26:

²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's **at His coming** [*tē parousía autou*], ²⁴then *comes* the end,

¹²1 Corinthians 15 strongly indicates that Christ’s current reign in heaven *must* be the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, since Christ is to relinquish the kingdom to God the Father at His *parousía*. Verses 25-26 declare that Christ “must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death.” Remember that death is destroyed at the resurrection that occurs at Christ’s Second Coming or *parousía*. This means that the end, when Christ “delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father,” occurs when the Lord Jesus returns in glory at the end of the New Covenant age. *Therefore, Christ’s current reign in heaven is the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant.* Is such a view of 1 Corinthians 15 compatible with the stipulations of the Davidic Covenant? Or can the Davidic Covenant *only* be fulfilled in an earthly millennial reign of Christ as premillennialists claim? All forms of premillennialism teach that the Lord Jesus Christ will reign over the earth from Jerusalem after David has been resurrected. See MacArthur, *MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1606. MacArthur states: “those who come to faith during the Tribulation, **with the OT saints as well**, will be raised up to reign with Him during the Millennium” [emphasis mine].

The problem with this teaching lies in the fact that it directly contradicts the terms of the Davidic Covenant! Recall that the Lord promised David, “**When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers**, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom” (2 Sam 7:12) [emphasis mine]. In other words, David *has* to already be dead, for God to raise up David’s Greater Son and “establish his kingdom.” This is why the Apostle Peter emphasizes the fact that David is dead in Acts 2 as a proof that Christ’s cosmic reign at the Father’s right hand fulfills the Davidic Covenant: “²⁵For David says of Him, ‘I was always beholding the Lord in my presence; For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. ²⁶Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted; Moreover my flesh also will abide in hope; ²⁷Because Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay. ²⁸Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; Thou wilt make me full of gladness with Thy presence.’ ²⁹**Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰And so, because he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants upon his throne, ³¹he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. ³²This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. ³³Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. ³⁴For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, ³⁵Until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet.’ ³⁶Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ-- this Jesus whom you crucified” [emphasis mine]. Furthermore, 1 Chronicles 28:5, 1 Chronicles 29:23, and 2 Chronicles 9:8 clearly indicate that David’s earthly throne is **typological** of God’s heavenly throne.**

See John G. Reisinger, *Abraham’s Four Seeds: A Biblical Examination of the Presuppositions of Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism* (Frederick: New Covenant Media, 1998), 56. Reisinger highlights this truth with the following words: “Further proof of this time factor can be seen in the words ‘while David was sleeping with the fathers.’ This can only mean that Christ would sit on David’s throne at the *same time* that David was still ‘sleeping with the fathers,’ or *before David’s resurrection*. This is why Peter deliberately mentioned that David is ‘both dead and buried and his sepulcher is with us unto this day.’ Peter is saying, ‘The promise to David has been fulfilled in the exact manner and precise time (how and when) as it was prophesied to David.’ The throne was to be established at the time of the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and it would happen ‘while David was sleeping with his fathers’ awaiting his own resurrection (1 Chronicles 17:11 and Acts 13:35, 36 for the same time reference).”

when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. ²⁶***The last enemy that will be abolished is death [emphasis mine].***

In 1 Corinthians 15:51-57, he declares:

⁵¹Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³***For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory.”*** ⁵⁵“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; ⁵⁷but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ **[emphasis mine]**.

Since Death is destroyed in both 1 Corinthians 15:22-26 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-58, the *parousia* of 1 Corinthians 15:23 **has to be** the event described in 1 Corinthians 15:51-58. Furthermore, the *parousia* of 1 Corinthians 15:23, 51-57 is “the end” (1 Cor 15:24), when Death is destroyed. This exegetical reality leaves **no** room for a two-stage return of Christ or a literal, earthly millennium.¹³ Revelation 20:12-14 teaches that “death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire” after the Great White Throne Judgment. The only way to reconcile Revelation 20:12-14 with 1 Corinthians 15 is to recognize that Death is destroyed at the resurrection which occurs at Christ’s *parousia* and is subsequently thrown into the lake of fire at the Final Judgment which occurs immediately after Christ’s return.

1 Corinthians 15:20-28 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 highlight **five** characteristics of Christ’s *parousia*. *First*, a trumpet is associated with the resurrection of believers (1 Cor 15:51-53). *Second*, believers will be resurrected at Christ’s *parousia* (1 Cor 15:20-23, 51-57). *Third*, the *parousia* of 1 Corinthians 15:23, 51-57 is “the end” (1 Cor 15:24). *Fourth*, Death is destroyed at the *general* resurrection when the Lord Jesus Christ returns (1 Cor 15:25-26, 51-58). *Fifth*, since Death is destroyed when Christ returns, the Final Judgment also occurs by implication **shortly** after His *parousia* (1 Cor 15:20-28; cf. Rev. 20:12-14).

2 Peter 3

Parousia occurs twice with reference to Christ’s return in the Second Epistle of Peter. It first occurs in 2 Peter 3:4 in the mouths of the last day scoffers who brazenly mock, “Where is the promise of His coming [*tēs parousias*]? For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.” The context of the passage indicates that the scoffers are mocking God’s promise that He will return to judge mankind, destroy the earth with fire, and destroy the wicked (2 Pet 3:5-7). In verse 10, Peter responds to the scoffers’ mocking by declaring: “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.” The context clearly

¹³Most premillennialists argue that the temporal adverb *eita* (meaning “then”) in the phrase “then *comes* the end” (1 Cor 15:24) signals that “the end” occurs after a literal, earthly millennium. Therefore, the crucial question regarding this particular word is whether it indicates that “the end” occurs at Christ’s *parousia* or after a literal, earthly millennium. However, this particular question can only be answered by the local context in which *eita* appears. Although *eita* can signal a long interval as Premillennialists claim, the context argues that Christ’s *parousia* is the end. Recall that Death is destroyed in both 1 Corinthians 15:22-26 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-58. Also recall that Death is destroyed at “the end” (1 Cor 15:24). Furthermore, since the *parousia* is the event described in both 1 Corinthians 15:22-26 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-58, Christ’s *parousia* signals the end. Thus, in the context here the temporal adverb *eita* does not indicate a long interval.

indicates that the Apostle Peter understands Christ's *parousía* and the "Day of the Lord" to refer to the same eschatological event.¹⁴ The fact that Peter understands Christ's *parousía* to be synonymous with the Day of the Lord is even more apparent when 2 Peter 3:10 is understood in light of its two subsequent verses. 2 Peter 3:10-12 reads:

¹⁰But *the day of the Lord* will come like a thief,¹⁵ in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ¹¹Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹²looking for and hastening *the coming* [*tēn parousian*] *of the day of God*, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

In other words, when the Lord Jesus returns in glory, the entire cosmos will be destroyed with fire. When the understanding of 1 Corinthians 15 and Matthew 24 is combined with the understanding of 2 Peter 3:3-12, it clearly reveals that Christ's *parousía* signals His return in glory, the destruction of His enemies (including death, the last enemy), the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, and the destruction of the cosmos by fire. Interestingly, Peter's equation of Christ's *parousía* and the 'Day of the Lord' has *significant* implications for many New Testament eschatological passages, in particular 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10.

2 Thessalonians 2

The Greek word *parousía* occurs twice in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8 with reference to Christ's return. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8 declares:

¹Now we request you, brethren, with regard to *the coming* [*tēs parousias*] of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, ²that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that *the day of the Lord* has come. ³Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. ⁵Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? ⁶And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. ⁷For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains *will do so* until he is taken out of the way. ⁸And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by *the appearance* [*tē epiphaneia*] of *His coming* [*tēs parousias autou*] [**emphasis mine**].¹⁶

¹⁴Many Dispensational Premillennialists understand the term 'Day of the Lord' to refer to either the seven-year tribulation or the entire period extending from the pre-tribulation rapture to the end of the premillennial kingdom. See J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1964), 229-232. The Dispensational conclusion that the 'Day of the Lord' is a period greater than a twenty-four-hour day demonstrates the inconsistency of the *literal* or *normal* hermeneutic of Dispensational Premillennialism.

¹⁵Although Dispensationalists typically understand Jesus' reference to "the thief in the night" analogy in Matthew 24:43 as applying to the pre-tribulation rapture, the context of Matthew 24:43 strongly indicates that it is in fact a reference to His Second Coming. When Peter states in 2 Peter 3:10 that "the day of the Lord will come like a thief," he is obviously making an allusion to Matthew 24:43. Like Jesus, he uses it not to describe a pre-tribulation rapture of the Church but the Second Coming of Christ in glory.

¹⁶Dispensational Premillennialism teaches that salvation is possible after Christ returns. For instance, this system teaches that many Jews will come to Christ during the seven-year tribulation after the pretribulation rapture, and it also teaches that countless individuals will be saved during Christ's millennial reign which immediately follows His glorious appearing. See Walvoord, "Escape from Planet Earth," 377-8. Walvoord writes the following: "Paul further supports this idea of a pretribulation rapture by calling attention to the fact that the day of the Lord cannot begin until the restrainer of sin is taken out of the way (2 Thessalonians 2:7). While there is debate as to who this person is, obviously the suggested

The first occurrence of *parousía* is 2 Thessalonians 2:1, which states: “Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming [*tēs parousias*] of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him...” Dispensationalists typically maintain that this verse refers to the pretribulation rapture because of the words “our gathering to Him.” For example, MacArthur states, “‘The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering to Him’ is a clear reference to the *Rapture*.”¹⁷ The second occurrence of *parousía* is 2 Thessalonians 2:8, which states: “And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming [*tēs parousias autou*].” MacArthur maintains that this verse refers to Christ’s Second Coming because of the explicit references to the Antichrist, destruction, and judgment:

And notice that He immediately executes vengeance on the Antichrist and the evil hordes of earth. As for the Antichrist, the lawless one, “The Lord will consume [him] with the breath of His mouth and destroy [him] with the brightness of His coming” (2 Thess 2:8). The rest of the wicked are destroyed with the sword that proceeds from Christ’s mouth (Rev. 19:21), possibly significantly that He judges and slays them merely by speaking the Word of God [**emphasis mine**].¹⁸

Like the Dispensational interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:51-58, the Dispensational interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2:1 is built on an *argument from silence*. In other words, since the verse contains no explicit reference to unbelievers, judgment, torment, punishment, or glory, *parousía* in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 refers to a pretribulation rapture. However, because 2 Thessalonians 2:8 contains explicit references to the Antichrist, destruction, and judgment, *parousía* in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 refers

powers for good such as human government do not exist in the endtimes because the government is wholly evil. It certainly is not Satan himself, and the historic answer based on Genesis 6:3 is that the ultimate One who restrains sin is the Holy Spirit. As He is indwelling the church prior to the rapture, the Holy Spirit is not free to be ‘removed.’ But if He is removed, the church would have to be removed with Him. This does not mean that He is entirely taken out of the earthly sphere, but that He is removed in the same sense as when He came on the day of Pentecost. He will still be in the world; people will still be able to be saved by Him, but He will lift the restraint of evil that now exists because the church indwelt by the Holy Spirit influences the world with its moral principles. It may fairly be concluded that it will be impossible to remove the Holy Spirit in the sense given in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 unless the church is also raptured.”

There is a significant internal contradiction within the Dispensational teaching that salvation is possible after both a pretribulation rapture and Christ’s Second Coming in glory. At Pentecost and its subsequent apostolic extensions (Acts 2, 8, 10, 18), the ascended Christ poured out the Holy Spirit upon His followers in fulfillment of the promises of the New Covenant (cf. Ezek 36:26-27). The result of this Spirit baptism was the formation of the Church, a new humanity comprised of elect Jew and elect Gentile (Eph 2:11-22). Many Dispensationalists teach that Old Testament saints are not numbered among the ranks of the Church. However, this teaching is without biblical foundation, as Hebrews 11:40 declares that Old Testament saints will “not be made perfect” “apart from us,” that is, New Covenant believers. Spirit Baptism, like the atonement, was retroactive reaching back to include *all* Old Testament believers into the Church, the Body of Christ. From Pentecost onward, the Holy Spirit indwells *all* believers, seals *all* believers, and unites *all* believers in *one* body to Christ. It is at this point that the internal contradiction regarding Dispensationalism’s teaching that salvation is possible after Christ’s return becomes apparent. Recall that Walvoord remarked that the Holy Spirit “is removed in the same sense as when He came on the day of Pentecost.” If Spirit baptism ends at the pretribulation rapture, *no one* can be saved subsequent to it. Why? The indwelling of believers by the Holy Spirit accompanies Spirit baptism; as a result, if Spirit baptism ceases at the rapture, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit ceases as well. This becomes a serious issue, since Romans 8:9 declares, “But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.” In other words, if anyone is not indwelt by the Holy Spirit, that individual does not belong to Christ. If Spirit baptism ends at the pretribulation rapture, as Dispensationalists claim, salvation is *not* possible after the rapture. The validity of this argument cannot be undermined by illegitimately reversing it in an attempt to say that the majority of Old Testament saints are not saved because all of them were not indwelt by the Spirit. Remember that Spirit baptism, like the atonement, was retroactively applied to all Old Testament saints *at Pentecost*, thus bringing them into the Church.

¹⁷John F. MacArthur, *The Second Coming: Signs of Christ’s Return and the End of the Age* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 55.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 130.

to Christ's Second Coming in glory. It goes without saying that such conclusions are exegetically weak and rely on a *significantly* inconsistent interpretation of the word *parousía*.

There are **three** contextual clues which strongly indicate that **both** occurrences of *parousía* in this passage refer to Christ's Second Coming in glory. *First*, the noun *episynagōgē* ("gathering") in the phrase "our gathering to Him" (2 Thess 2:1) is derived from the same verb (*episynagō*) which appears in Matthew 24:31 ("they will gather together [*episunaxousin*] His elect from the four winds"). Hoekema writes, "It is interesting to note that the Greek word translated... 'our being gathered to him' (*episynagōgē*) is the noun form of the verb used of the rapture in Matthew 24:31, 'they will gather [*episynagō*] his elect... from one end of heaven to the other.'"¹⁹ As noted above, Matthew 24:27-31 describes the timing and nature of Christ's Second Coming, and the similar word choice between that passage and 2 Thessalonians 2:1 evinces that **both** passages refer to the same event. *Secondly*, the context of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8 **strongly** indicates the Apostle Paul understands Christ's *parousía* and the 'Day of the Lord' to refer to the **same** eschatological event. The apostle initiates his discussion in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 with the words "with regard to the coming [*tēs parousias*] of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him" and then employs the term 'Day of the Lord' in the very next verse. Recall that 2 Peter 3:10-12 **strongly** indicates that the Apostle Peter understood Christ's *parousía* and the 'Day of the Lord' to refer to the **same** eschatological event. The Apostle Paul, like Peter, understands the terms *parousía* and 'Day of the Lord' to refer to **same** eschatological event. *Thirdly*, it is **extremely** unlikely that the Apostle Paul vested the word *parousía* with two *different* meanings within the span of eight verses. 2 Thessalonians 2:8 clearly refers to Christ's Second Coming in glory, when He will destroy the Antichrist, "the lawless one," by the appearance of His *parousía*.²⁰ To suppose that *parousía* in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 refers to a pretribulation rapture, while the **same** word seven verses later in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 refers to the Second Coming does violence to the logical flow and sense of the entire passage. Rather, the context of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8 **strongly** indicates that the Apostle Paul uses both occurrences of *parousía* to refer to Christ's Second Coming.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-8 highlights **four** characteristics of Christ's *parousía*. *First*, believers will be gathered "to Him" at Christ's *parousía* (2 Thess 2:1). *Secondly*, the Lord's return will be preceded by two events: the apostasy and the revelation of the Antichrist (2 Thess 2:3). *Thirdly*, Christ will destroy the Antichrist at His *parousía* (2 Thess 2:8). *Lastly*, the use of the term *epiphaneia* ("appearing") in conjunction with Christ's *parousía* indicates that Christ's return will be an event visible to all.

1 Thessalonians

The Greek word *parousía* occurs four²¹ times with reference to Christ's return in Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians, which according to Dispensationalists contains a vital proof text for the

¹⁹Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1979), 167.

²⁰2 Thessalonians 2:8 clearly indicates that the Apostle Paul understands Christ's *parousía* and the *epiphaneia* ("appearing") to refer to the same eschatological event.

²¹Although the Greek word *parousía* occurs four times with reference to Christ's return in Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 2:19, 3:13, 4:15, and 5:23), for the purposes of this paper only 1 Thessalonians 3:13, 4:13, and 5:23 will be examined. 1 Thessalonians 2:19 declares, "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming [*tē autou parousía*]?" There are **no** contextual indicators in or around 1 Thessalonians 2:19 that indicate the verse refers to a pretribulation rapture. Furthermore, "the crown of exultation" likely refers to rewards given to believers at the Great White Throne Judgment.

pretribulation rapture (i.e. 1 Thess 4:15-17).²² The word occurs first in 1 Thessalonians 3:13: “so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming (*tē parousía*) of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.” Commenting on the phrase “all His saints,” MacArthur writes, “Since this exact term is not used elsewhere in the NT of angels..., but is commonly used for believers, *it is best to understand the coming of the Lord to rapture all of His church*...and take them to heaven to enjoy His presence...” [emphasis mine].²³ In other words, MacArthur understands “all His saints” as meaning ‘all His saints up to the rapture.’ I believe that this Dispensational interpretation is forced on the text and that there is a simpler and more accurate way to interpret 1 Thessalonians 3:13. The most natural way to interpret 1 Thessalonians 3:13 is that when Christ returns at His *parousía*, He will return with *all* His saints, meaning all His saints *throughout history*. Hoekema astutely observes that “...the passage clearly says that Christ will return with *all* his saints, not just with some of them. How does this leave room for the reemergence of other saints who have not yet been born, and who must still be converted during the millennium?”²⁴ Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ will return with *all*, not only part, of His saints at His *parousía*.

The second occurrence of the word *parousía* is in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, which Dispensationalists insist refers to the pretribulation rapture of the Church.²⁵ In this passage, Paul authoritatively declares:

¹⁵For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain *until the coming* [*tēn parousian*] *of the Lord*, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. ¹⁷Then 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 [emphasis mine].

The *primary* reason that Dispensationalists insist that 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 refers to pretribulation rapture is that there is no *explicit* reference to unbelievers, judgment, torment, punishment, or glory. This is, yet again, an argument from silence, which ignores the purpose and context of Paul’s discussion. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, Paul writes: “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.” Apparently, some of the Thessalonians were grieving under the mistaken notion that their fellow believers who had already passed away would miss the *parousía* of Christ. The Apostle attempts to correct their view regarding Christ’s coming and at the same time comfort his readers with

²²See Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Press, 1982; reprint 2002), 142-154; MacArthur, *MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1758; Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986; reprint 1999), 537-9; John F. Walvoord, *Every Prophecy of the Bible: Clear Explanations for Uncertain Times by One of Today’s Premier Prophecy Scholars* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1999), 481-4; Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies*, 268-76.

²³MacArthur, *MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1755.

²⁴Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 218. Based upon Matthew 16:27, 25:31; Mk 8:38; and 2 Thess 1:7, some argue that “all His saints” in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 refers to *angels* and not *believers*. While this is a possible interpretation of this phrase, it is more likely that Paul is referring to believers here, since this is how he primarily uses “saints” in his writings (cf. Rom 1:7, 8:27, 12:13, 15:25-26, 16:2, 16:15; 1 Cor 1:2, 6:1-2, 14:33, 16:1, 16:15; 2 Cor 1:1, etc.). Furthermore, even if 1 Thessalonians 3:13 is understood in this manner, “all his saints” would include *all believers* and *all angels*, since the word *saints* can carry the meaning of believers and/or angels.

²⁵See Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Press, 1982; reprint 2002), 142-154; MacArthur, *MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1758; Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986; reprint 1999), 537-9; John F. Walvoord, *Every Prophecy of the Bible: Clear Explanations for Uncertain Times by One of Today’s Premier Prophecy Scholars* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1999), 481-4; Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies*, 268-76.

the words: “the dead in Christ shall rise first. ¹⁷Then 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 4:16-17). Paul is specifically addressing an issue which was prevalent *among believers* in the Thessalonian church. As a result, it is not necessary for him to mention unbelievers, judgment, destruction, punishment, or torment in this passage. Therefore, the Dispensational position that 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 refers to a pretribulation rapture of the Church because it does not mention these things is nothing more than an argument from silence without contextual foundation.

One must ask the question, “Does the event which Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 truly differ from the one which Matthew describes in Matthew 24:27-31?” The answer, in brief, is no. Why? *First*, both Matthew and Paul refer to this cosmic event as “*the coming [hē parousía] of the Son of Man*” (Matt 24:27) and “*the coming [tēn parousian] of the Lord*” (1 Thess 4:15) respectively. *Second*, there are far too many similarities between their respective descriptions of Christ’s *parousía* for the two apostles to be referring to two completely different events. Both accounts mention “the descent of the Lord, the sound of the trumpet,” the presence of angels, and “the gathering of all of God’s true people.”²⁶ It seems clear that 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 and Matthew 24:27-31 refer to *same* eschatological event.

The third and final occurrence of the word *parousía* is 1 Thessalonians 5:23: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming [*tē parousía*] of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Concerning this verse, MacArthur writes, “This fourth mention of Christ’s *parousía* refers to the rapture of the church as it has previously at 2:19; 3:13; 4:15.”²⁷ However, there are no contextual markers in or around this verse that indicate why *parousía* in this verse should be understood as a pretribulation rapture. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that Paul would suddenly vest the word with a radically different meaning, since it has been contextually demonstrated that the two previously addressed occurrences of *parousía* in 1 Thessalonians refer to Christ’s Second Coming in glory and *not* to a pretribulation rapture.

1 Thessalonians 3:13, 4:15, 5:23 highlight *six* characteristics of Christ’s *parousía*. *First*, the Lord Jesus Christ will return with *all*, not only part, of His saints at His *parousía* (1 Thess 3:13). *Second*, the presence of angels is mentioned in conjunction with Christ’s return (1 Thess 4:16). *Third*, a trumpet is associated with the resurrection of believers (1 Thess 4:16). *Fourth*, “the dead in Christ” will rise first when Christ’s *parousía* occurs (1 Thess 4:16). *Fifth*, those believers who are alive when Christ returns will be translated into their resurrection bodies (1 Thess 4:17). *Sixth*, all believers will be caught up together to meet Christ in the air (1 Thess 4:17).

The Definite Parousía

It is important to note that whenever *parousía* describes Christ’s return in the New Testament, it *always* occurs with the definite article. In *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Wallace specifically lists the use of the definite article with the Greek word *parousía* in James 5:8 under the “monadic” use of the article.²⁸ He defines the “monadic” definite article as meaning “one of a kind” or “unique.”²⁹

²⁶Ibid., 167.

²⁷MacArthur, *MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1762.

²⁸See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond The Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 223-4. James 5:8 declares, “You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for *the coming [hē parousía] of the Lord* is at hand.”

²⁹Ibid., 223.

Moreover, this concept can be applied to *all* occurrences of *parousía* which refer to Christ's return, as they all occur with the definite article. The fact that Christ's *parousía* is a "unique" or "one of a kind" event strengthens the fact that it is a *one-stage, one-time* eschatological event, *not* an event which is fulfilled in multiple stages. In other words, the Greek word *parousía* refers to *one, very specific* coming of Christ, not a two-stage coming of Christ with a pretribulation rapture and glorious appearing.

The Trumpet at the *Parousía*

One of the significant commonalities which exist between Matthew 24:27-31, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, and 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 51-57 is the presence of the eschatological trumpet of God. For instance, Matthew 24:31 declares that when the Lord Jesus Christ returns, "He will send forth His angels with *a great trumpet* and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" [**emphasis mine**]. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 similarly states that Christ "will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel, and *with the trumpet of God*; and the dead in Christ shall rise first" [**emphasis mine**]. Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, the Apostle Paul proclaims, "Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trumpet*; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed" [**emphasis mine**].³⁰ The presence of God's eschatological trumpet in all three of these passages is yet another indicator that they all describe the same event: Christ's glorious *parousía*. Additionally, the repeated connection of God's eschatological trumpet with Christ's return resoundingly indicates that Christ's *parousía* is the eschatological fulfillment of the Feast of Trumpets (Lev 23:23-25).³¹

³⁰Recall that Dispensational Premillennialists understand 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 as a reference to a pretribulation rapture. See MacArthur, *MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1608-10. Such an interpretation necessitates that "the last trumpet" of 1 Corinthians 15:52 is not *the* last trumpet, as Dispensationalists believe seven trumpets sound during the seven-year tribulation (cf. Rev 7-11) and another sounds at the Second Coming (cf. Matt 24:31). Instead of being the last trumpet of *all* trumpets, it is the last trumpet of the Church age. However, such an understanding is not derived from the literal meaning of the text, but is read into it. Such interpretation demonstrates the inconsistency of the *literal* or *normal* hermeneutic of Dispensational Premillennialism.

³¹The first day of Tishri, the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar, marks a sacred Jewish festival: the Feast of Trumpets. This particular feast is also known by other names, such as Rosh Hashanah (lit. "the head of the year") and *Yom Teruah* (lit. "the Day of the Shout") and was celebrated by the blowing of the *shofar*, a trumpet made from the horn of a ram. Leviticus 23:23-25 outlines this sacred festival: "Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁴Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'In the seventh month on the first of the month, you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets (תְּרוּצָה, *těru'áh*), a holy convocation. ²⁵You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD.'" In the Old Testament, the blowing of trumpets served three chief purposes: to assemble Israel before the Lord (Ex 19:13-19, 20:18; Num 10:2; Isa 27:13), to sound the alarm or battle cry in time of war (Num 10:9; Josh 6:4, 20; Judg 3:27, 6:34, 7:8-22; Neh 4:18; Job 39:25; Jer 4:5, 19), and to signal the coronation of the king of Israel (2 Sam 15:10; 1 Kgs 1:34, 39; 2 Kgs 9:13, 11:12-14).

The New Testament clearly demonstrates that the nature and timing of Christ's *parousía* fulfills the Feasts of Trumpets. Colossians 2:16-17 teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ is *the fulfillment* of all the Jewish feast days, new moons, and Sabbaths. How does He fulfill the Feast of Trumpets? *The first function of the trumpet in the Old Testament was to assemble Israel before the Lord.* This particular aspect is fulfilled in the resurrection and gathering of believers at Christ's Second Coming. For instance, at Christ's *parousía*, *all* believers will be resurrected "at the last trumpet" (1 Cor 15:51-52; cf. 1 Thess 4:15-17), will be "caught up together... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess 4:17), and will be gathered "from one end of the sky to the other" (Matt 24:29-31; cf. Rev 6:12-17). *Christ's return will also fulfill the second function of the trumpet in the Old Testament: to sound the alarm or battle cry in time of war.* When the Lord Jesus blows the Trumpet of God at His *parousía*, He will also be sounding the battle cry for the climactic Battle of Armageddon (Rev 19:13-20). *The third function of the shofar was to signal the coronation of the king of Israel in the Old Testament,* and this too will be fulfilled when Christ returns, as Revelation 11:15-18 declares. Interestingly, this particular function of the *shofar* will *also* signal the consummation of Christ's reign as the Davidic monarch. This is strikingly evident as 1 Corinthians 15:24-26 teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ at His glorious return "delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has

Day of the Lord

Day of the Lord is a significant eschatological term which appears frequently in both Old and New Testaments. Whereas the Old Testament authors used the term both “eschatologically” and “non-eschatologically,”³² the authors of the New Testament exclusively used the term to refer to Christ’s return. In fact, both Peter and Paul used the term interchangeably with the Greek word *parousía*. This section will briefly analyze six passages of Scripture in which the term *Day of the Lord* occurs: 2 Peter 3, 2 Thessalonians 2, 1 Thessalonians, Zephaniah 1:14-18, Isaiah 13:6-13, and Joel 2:1-11. Examining how this particular term functions in each of these passages will certainly aid in determining the biblical teaching regarding Christ’s return.

2 Peter 3 & 2 Thessalonians 2

Recall that the Apostles Peter and Paul both understood Christ’s *parousía* and the “Day of the Lord” to refer to the same eschatological event. *First*, 2 Peter 3:10-12 evinces that Peter understood the Day of the Lord to be synonymous with Christ’s *parousía*:

¹⁰But ***the day of the Lord*** [*hēmera kuriou*] will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ¹¹Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹²looking for and hastening ***the coming*** [*tēn parousian*] ***of the day of God***, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat [**emphasis mine**]!

Second, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 demonstrates that Paul also equated the two terms. This passage states, “Now we request you, brethren, with regard ***to the coming*** [*tēs parousias*] ***of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him***, ²that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that ***the day of the Lord has come***” [**emphasis mine**]. The fact that both Peter and Paul understood Christ’s *parousía* and the “Day of the Lord” to refer to the same eschatological event has *significant* implications for the New Testament eschatological passage of 1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:10.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:10

abolished all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵ For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. ²⁶ The last enemy that will be abolished is death.”

Two additional features of the Old Testament Feast of Trumpets which will be fulfilled at Christ’s Second Coming are worthy of mention. First, recall that one of the alternate names for this particular Jewish feast is *Yom Teruah* (lit. “the Day of the Shout”). Interestingly, in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Paul states, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven ***with a shout***, with the voice of *the* archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first” [**emphasis mine**]. Secondly, an intense spirit of watchfulness permeated the observance of this feast, since the trumpets were to be sounded as soon as the smallest portion of the New Moon was visible. In a similar manner, the life of a New Covenant believer is to be characterized by an intense attitude of watchfulness with regard to Christ’s *parousía*. Concerning His return, the Lord Jesus declared, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. . . . Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. . . . For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think *He will*” (Matt 24: 36, 42, 44).

³²See R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 371. Harris, Archer, and Waltke write, “It [Day of the Lord] can be used eschatologically and non-eschatologically. It is a day of judgment and/or blessing (Isa 2). Hence, the eschatological meaning embraced by this idea entails all of prophetic eschatology. . . .”

Dispensationalists assert that 1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:10 clearly teaches a two-stage return of Christ.³³ In other words, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 supposedly describes a pretribulation rapture, while 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 describes the Day of the Lord. However, such an interpretation impedes the logical flow of Paul's argument. It is *far* more likely that 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 speaks of the *nature* of Christ's *parousia* and 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 speaks of the *timing* of His *parousia*. The Apostle Paul writes the following in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:10:

¹⁵For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until *the coming* [*tēn parousian*] *of the Lord*, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. ¹⁷Then 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. ¹⁸Therefore comfort one another with these words. ^{5:1}Now as to the times and the epochs [reference to time], brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. ²For you yourselves know full well that *the day of the Lord* [*hēmera kuriou*] will come just like a thief in the night. ³While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. ⁴But you, brethren, are not in darkness, *that the day should overtake you like a thief* [Notice that Paul is still talking to the members of the Thessalonian Church, and he tells them that the Day of the Lord will not overtake them by surprise, not that they will not be present for the Day of the Lord]; ⁵for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; ⁶so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. ⁷For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. ⁸But since we are *of the day*, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. ⁹For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him [**emphasis mine**].

The Dispensational teaching regarding 1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:10 is founded upon two *exegetically-weak* assertions. *First*, because there is no *explicit* mention of unbelievers, wrath, or judgment in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, proponents of Dispensational Premillennialism argue that this passage *must* refer to a pretribulation rapture.³⁴ However, this is yet another argument from silence. As previously stated, the Apostle Paul did not need to mention unbelievers, wrath, or judgment in these verses, as he was merely assuring the Thessalonians that their deceased brothers and sisters in Christ would not miss the *parousia* of Christ Jesus. Any mention of unbelievers, judgment, torment, or punishment would have actually detracted from the flow, purpose, and clarity of his argument. *Second*, Dispensationalists argue that 1 Thessalonians 5:1 marks such a dramatic shift in Paul's thought that 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 must refer to a distinctly different eschatological event. MacArthur writes, "Paul used familiar Greek words here to indicate a change of topics within the same general subject of prophecy (cf. 4:9, 13; 1 Cor. 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). The expression here points to the idea that within the broader context of the end time coming of the Lord Jesus, *the subject is changing from a discussion of the blessings of the Rapture of believers to the judgment of unbelievers* [i.e. Second Coming]."³⁵ 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 reads as follows: "Now [*de*] as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. ²For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night." Although Paul uses the conjunction δε ("now") to indicate a transition in his argument, he is not transitioning from a discourse on the pretribulation rapture to a discourse on Christ's Second Coming. Rather, the Apostle is shifting the focus of his discussion from the *nature* of Christ's return (1 Thess 4:15-18) to the *timing* of His return

³³MacArthur, *MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1757-60.

³⁴Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies*, 277.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 1759.

(1 Thess 5:1-10).³⁶ The Dispensational argument that Paul is shifting his discussion from a pretribulation rapture to the Second Coming in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 appears to be based more on the non-inspired³⁷ chapter break between the epistle's fourth and fifth chapters than the flow of the text itself.³⁸

Old Testament References to the Day of the Lord

In the Old Testament, the Day of the Lord was typically accompanied by the blowing of trumpets, God's judgment, and terrifying cosmic disturbances. For instance, Zephaniah 1:14-18 clearly associates the blowing of trumpets with the Day of the Lord:

¹⁴Near is the great **day of the LORD** [yôm-Yěhwāh], near and coming very quickly; listen, **the day of the LORD** [yôm-Yěhwāh]! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. ¹⁵A day of wrath is that day, a day of trouble and distress, A day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, ¹⁶A **day of trumpet and battle cry**, against the fortified cities and the high corner towers. ¹⁷And I will bring distress on men, so that they will walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the LORD; and their blood will be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung. ¹⁸Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the LORD's wrath; and all the earth will be devoured In the fire of His jealousy, for He will make a complete end, indeed a terrifying one, of all the inhabitants of the earth [**emphasis mine**].

Isaiah 13:6-13 states that the Day of the Lord will be characterized by terror, destruction, judgment, and terrifying cosmic disturbances in the heavens:

⁶**Wail, for the day of the LORD** [yôm Yěhwāh] **is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty.** ⁷Therefore all hands will fall limp, and every man's heart will melt. ⁸**And they will be terrified,** Pains and anguish will take hold of *them*; they will writhe like a woman in labor, they will look at one another in astonishment, their faces aflame. ⁹**Behold, the day of the LORD** [yôm-Yěhwāh] **is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger,** to make the land a desolation; **and He will exterminate its sinners from it.** ¹⁰**For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will not shed its light.** ¹¹**Thus I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity;** I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud, and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless. ¹²I will make mortal man scarcer than pure gold, and mankind than the gold of Ophir. ¹³**Therefore I shall make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken from its place at the fury of the LORD of hosts in the day of His burning anger** [**emphasis mine**].

Joel 2:1-11's description of the Day of the Lord highlights both the blowing of trumpets and terrifying cosmic disturbances:

¹**Blow a trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm on My holy mountain!** Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, **for the day of the LORD** [yôm-Yěhwāh] **is coming;** Surely it is near, ²A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, *So* there is a great

³⁶In 1 Thess 4:15-5:10, Paul shifts the focus of his discussion from the *nature* of Christ's return (1 Thess 4:15-18) to the *timing* of His return (1 Thess 5:1-10). The Apostle uses this same logical sequence when discussing the Lord's *parousia* in 2 Thessalonians 1:4-2:8. He first describes the *nature* of Christ's return (2 Thess 1:4-10) then the *timing* of His return (2 Thess 2:1-8).

³⁷Although perhaps obvious, it is necessary to emphasize that the chapter breaks and verse apparatus which men have imposed upon God's Word are *not* inspired.

³⁸Furthermore, the Dispensational argument that Paul is shifting his discussion between a pretribulation rapture and the glorious appearing in 2 Thessalonians 1:4-2:8 appears to be based more on the non-inspired chapter break between the epistle's first and second chapters than the flow of the text itself.

and mighty people; there has never been *anything* like it, nor will there be again after it to the years of many generations....¹⁰ ***Before them the earth quakes, The heavens tremble, The sun and the moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness.***¹¹ And the LORD utters His voice before His army; surely His camp is very great, for strong is he who carries out His word. ***The day of the LORD*** [yôm-Yêhwâh] is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it [emphasis mine]?

Interestingly, the New Testament authors' descriptions of Christ's *parousía* match that of the Day of the Lord in the Old Testament. For instance, Matthew 24:27-31 states:

²⁷For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall ***the coming*** [hē *parousía*] ***of the Son of Man*** be....²⁹ ***But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken,***³⁰ and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, ***and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn,*** and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.³¹ ***And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet*** and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other [emphasis mine].

The Apostle John uses similar language to describe the momentous event of Christ's *parousía* in Revelation 6:12-17:

¹²And I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; ***and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood;***¹³ ***and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.***¹⁴ And the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.¹⁵ ***And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains;***¹⁶ ***and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;***¹⁷ ***for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand"*** [emphasis mine]?³⁹

Because the New Testament's descriptions of Christ's *parousía* **are** identical to the Old Testament's descriptions of the Day of the Lord and because the New Testament **must** interpret the Old Testament, *it is highly likely that Christ's parousía is the Day of the Lord.*

Apokalypsis

Apokalypsis (ἀποκαλυψις) is another Greek word that the New Testament authors frequently associated with Christ's return, and it is from this word that our English word *apocalypse* is derived. This particular word possesses two primary meanings: "making fully known, *revelation, disclosure*" or "as part of a book title *Revelation.*"⁴⁰ The first meaning can be subsequently broken down into *two* sub-categories: "of revelations of a particular kind, through visions, etc." or "of the disclosure of secrets belonging to the last days."⁴¹ Whenever *apokalypsis* occurs in conjunction with the Lord's return, it carries this *final* meaning. This section features a concise analysis of *five* passages of Scripture in which this word occurs: 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8, 1 Corinthians 1:7-9, 1 Peter, Luke 17:26-30, and Romans 8:19-23. Examining how this particular word functions in each of these passages will certainly aid in determining the biblical teaching regarding Christ's return.

³⁹Interestingly, the rhetorical question of the earth-dwellers in Revelation 6:17 parallels the rhetorical question in Joel 2:11.

⁴⁰Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 112.

⁴¹Ibid.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-8

*Apokalypsis*⁴² appears once in the first chapter of Paul's second epistle to the Thessalonians with reference to Christ's return: 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10. Most, if not all, Dispensationalists teach that this occurrence refers to Christ's return in glory as there are *explicit* references to judgment, retribution, angels, and affliction.⁴³ 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10 declares:

⁴therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. ⁵*This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.* ⁶*For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed [tē apokalypsei⁴⁴] from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, ⁸dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.* ⁹And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, ¹⁰*when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed-- for our testimony to you was believed [emphasis mine].*

Paul's usage of *apokalypsis* in this passage unmistakably refers to Christ's glorious return or *parousia*.

Like Matthew 24:36-42, this passage clearly teaches that relief for the righteous and the destruction of the wicked would occur at the same time: that day when the Lord Jesus returns:

⁴therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. ⁵*This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.* ⁶*For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed [tē apokalypsei] from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, ⁸dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.* ⁹*And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, ¹⁰when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed-- for our testimony to you was believed [emphasis].*

It is clear that the destruction of the wicked will occur on the same exact day that the righteous are gathered to be with the Lord. As a result, the Dispensational teaching that Christ will grant relief to His Church at a pretribulation rapture and destroy the wicked seven years later at His glorious appearing lacks biblical foundation.

⁴²Paul uses *apokalypsis* in three primary ways: (1) he uses ἀποκάλυψις to indicate a revelation of truth (Rom 16:25; Eph 1:17), (2) he uses *apokalypsis* to indicate a revelation through vision(s) (Gal 1:12; 1 Cor 2:4; 1 Cor 14:6; 1 Cor 14:26; 2 Cor 12:1; 2 Cor 12:7; Gal 2:2; Eph 3:3), and (3) a revelation of the disclosure of secrets belonging to the last days (Rom 2:5; Rom 8:19; 1 Cor 1:7; 2 Thess 1:7). Specifically, Romans 8:9 details the "time when they [i.e. believers] will be revealed in their glorified status" ("For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing (*apokalypsis*) of the sons of God."); in other words, "revelation of the sons of God" is the general eschatological resurrection when they will receive their resurrection bodies. It is also important to note that Romans 2:5 also deals with eschatological revelation, as it speaks of "the day of wrath and revelation (*apokalypsis*) of the righteous judgment of God."

⁴³See MacArthur, *MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1764-65; Walvoord, *Every Prophecy of the Bible*, 489-90;

⁴⁴Although *apokalypsis* is translated verbally in most English translations of 2 Thessalonians 1:7, a literal translation of the Greek text reads: "in the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful angels."

2 Thessalonians 1:4-10 highlights **four** characteristics of Christ's *parousía*. *First*, Christ's return will simultaneously signal the destruction of the wicked and the relief of the righteous (2 Thess 1:6-10). *Second*, the presence of angels is mentioned in conjunction with Christ's return (2 Thess 1:7). *Third*, fire is associated with Christ's glorious return (2 Thess 1:7). *Fourth*, when the Lord Jesus returns from heaven, He "comes to be glorified in His Saints, on that day" (2 Thess 1:10). This likely refers to the resurrection of believers, in whom Christ will be glorified when **all** believers are conformed to the sinless, resurrected, and glorified humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:7-9

Apokalypsis occurs only once in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians with reference to Christ's return: 1 Corinthians 1:7-9. Dispensational Premillennialists typically maintain that 1 Corinthians 1:7-8 teaches a pretribulation rapture: "So that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly **the revelation** [*tēn apokalupsin*] **of our Lord Jesus Christ**,⁸ who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" [**emphasis mine**].⁴⁵ It is true that there are no explicit references to judgment, unbelievers, or destruction in this passage. However, there are also **no** explicit contextual markers that indicate that "the revelation [*tēn apokalupsin*] of our Lord Jesus Christ" in 1 Corinthians 1:7 *must* be interpreted as a distinctly separate event from the one described in 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10. Thus, the Dispensational teaching regarding 1 Corinthians 1:7-9 is founded upon an argument from silence. Rather, it is **far** more likely that the occurrences of *apokalypsis* in 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10 and 1 Corinthians 1:7-8 refer to the **same** eschatological event, as it is unlikely that Paul would vest the same term with two different meanings. Hoekema highlights the inconsistency of the Dispensational interpretation:

...No argument for the two-stage coming can be derived from the use of the New Testament words for the Second Coming.... Turning next to the use of the word *apokalypsis*, we find Paul using it in I Corinthians 1:7 to describe what these interpreters call the rapture: 'as you wait for the revealing (or revelation, ASV) of our Lord Jesus Christ.' But in II Thessalonians 1:7-8 the same word is used to describe what pretribulationists call the second phase of the Second Coming: "...at the revelation (*apokalypsis*) of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God..." (ASV).⁴⁶

Interestingly, the translators of the King James Version translate *tēn apokalupsin* in 1 Corinthians 1:7 as "the coming," indicating that they understood *apokalypsis* as a synonym of *parousía*.

Two additional aspects of this text deserve mention. *First*, the Apostle's usage of *apokalypsis* in 1 Corinthians 1:7-8 indicates that he understood *apokalypsis* to be synonymous with the term "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." *Second*, Paul also understood that "the end" occurs at Christ's *apokalypsis*: "So that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly **the revelation** [*tēn apokalupsin*] **of our Lord Jesus Christ**,⁸ who shall also confirm you to **the end** [*telous*], blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." Recall that 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 51-57 teaches that the *parousía* is "the end" (1 Cor 15:24), when Death is destroyed:

²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's **at His coming** [*tē parousía autou*], ²⁴then comes **the end** [*to*

⁴⁵See Paul D. Feinberg, "Response [to Mid-Seventieth Week Rapture]," in *Three Views On The Millennium And Beyond*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 157; and Walvoord, *Every Prophecy of the Bible*, 457-8.

⁴⁶Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 165-6.

telos], when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. ²⁶The last enemy that will be abolished is death [**emphasis mine**].

That Christ's *apokalypsis* signals "the end" clearly removes **any** possibility for a two-stage return of Christ or a literal, earthly millennium. Why? Because New Covenant believers are eagerly awaiting Christ's *apokalypsis*, not a pretribulation rapture, and because Christ's *apokalypsis* signals "the end" (cf. 1 Cor 15:24), there is **no** room for a premillennial kingdom or a two-stage return of Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:7-8 highlights **five** characteristics of Christ's *parousía*. *First*, Paul's usage of *apokalypsis* implies that Christ's return will be a visible event. *Second*, New Covenant believers eagerly await Christ's *parousía* (1 Cor 1:8). *Third*, the *apokalypsis* of 1 Corinthians 1:7-8 is "the end" (1 Cor 1:8; cf. 1 Cor 15:24). *Fourth*, the reference to blamelessness indicates that the resurrection of believers occurs at Christ's *apokalypsis* (1 Cor 1:8). *Fifth*, the term "Day of the Lord Jesus Christ" is synonymous with not only *apokalypsis* but also *parousía*.

1 Peter

The Apostle Peter repeatedly uses the term *apokalypsis* to describe Christ's one-stage Second Coming in his first epistle. For instance, 1 Peter 1:7 declares, "That the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation [*en apokalupsei*] of Jesus Christ." Similarly, Peter states in 1 Peter 1:13, "Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation [*en apokalupsei*] of Jesus Christ." Dispensationalists teach that these two occurrences of *apokalypsis* in 1 Peter describe a pretribulation rapture, not Christ's glorious return. Regarding 1 Peter 1:7, MacArthur writes, "The revelation or unveiling of Christ refers to His Second Coming, particularly focusing on the time when He comes to call and reward His redeemed people (cf. **v. 13**; 4:13; 1 Cor. 1:7), *i.e.*, **the rapture** (1 Thess. 4:13-18)" [**emphasis mine**].⁴⁷ However, Peter's third use of *apokalypsis* in his first epistle clearly describes Christ's return in glory. 1 Peter 4:13 proclaims: "...but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also **at the revelation** [*tē apokalupsei*] **of His glory**, you may rejoice with exultation" [**emphasis mine**]. Regarding this verse, MacArthur comments, "That is, at **Christ's Second Coming** (cf. **Matt. 24:30; 25:31; Luke 17:30**). While Jesus is presently glorified in heaven, His glory is not yet fully revealed on earth" [**emphasis mine**].⁴⁸ Although it is true that there are no explicit references to judgment, unbelievers, or destruction in 1 Peter 1:7 and 1 Peter 1:13, the burden of proof is on Dispensational Premillennialists to prove that the contexts of these two passages **explicitly** describe a pretribulation rapture, while 1 Peter 4:13 describes Christ's return in glory. However, it is unlikely that the Apostle Peter would vest the same term with two different meanings in the same epistle.

Luke 17:26-30

The verbal form of *apokalypsis* appears in Luke 17:26-30, a passage which occurs in Luke's version of the Olivet Discourse. Luke 17:26-30 states:

And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it shall be also in the days of the Son of Man: ²⁷they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that

⁴⁷MacArthur, *MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1905.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 1919.

Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. ²⁸It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; ²⁹but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. ³⁰***It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed [apokaluptetai] [emphasis mine].***

Luke's use of *apokaluptetai* clearly refers to Christ's return in glory (cf. Matt 24:36-42). Moreover, the phrase "It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed [*apokaluptetai*]" in Luke 17:30 parallels "so shall the coming [*hē parousía*] of the Son of Man be" in Matthew 24:39. This phrasal parallelism further strengthens the argument that New Testament authors used *apokalypsis* as a synonym for *parousía*. Furthermore, Luke 17:26-30 teaches that Christ's *parousía* will simultaneously signal the destruction of the wicked and the relief of the righteous.

Romans 8:19-23

Apokalypsis occurs once in Romans 8:19-23, one of the most important eschatological texts in all Scripture. This Scriptural pericope *clearly* teaches that the resurrection of believers is inextricably linked to the resurrection or recreation of the cosmos. How? **First**, God's Word declares that all believers will be resurrected when the Lord Jesus returns at His *parousía* (cf. 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 3:13). For instance, 1 John 3:2 states, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is." This verse evinces that when Christ returns, all believers will be made like Him in His sinless and resurrected humanity. **Second**, Scripture also declares that when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven, His followers will be revealed with Him. For example, Colossians 3:4 proclaims: "When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory." Now, if *all* believers are both resurrected and revealed in glory when Christ is revealed from heaven, it is evident that the *apokalypsis* ("revealing") of Christ and the *apokalypsis* ("revealing") of all believers occur simultaneously. This has staggering implications for Romans 8:19-23:

¹⁹For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for ***the revealing [tēn apokalypsin] of the sons of God.*** ²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope ²¹***that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*** ²²For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. ²³And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body [***emphasis mine***].

In this passage, the Apostle Paul compares the current state of believers to that of creation. Just as "we ourselves groan within ourselves" (Rom 8:23), all of "creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now" (Rom 8:22). Moreover, just as "we ourselves" await "eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (Rom 8:23), the cosmos longs to "be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:21).

Furthermore, Romans 8:19 declares that the creation anxiously awaits the revelation [*tēn apokalypsin*] of the sons of God, which is their resurrection. Why does the creation so eagerly await this eschatologically climactic event? The creation eagerly awaits "the revelation of the sons of God" because the "resurrection" of creation in the New Heavens and the New Earth will occur simultaneously with the resurrection of the elect. Concerning Romans 8:19-23, Robert Strimple writes, "The apostle Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, teaches us that the resurrection glory of the children of God will mark the resurrection glory of creation as well. At Christ's coming, not a millennium later, 'the creation itself

will be liberated from its bondage to decay' and come to enjoy a glory that is likened to 'the glorious freedom of the children of God.'"⁴⁹ Elsewhere, he notes:

Paul describes the deliverance of creation as creation's liberation 'from its bondage to decay...into the glorious freedom of the children of God' (Rom. 8:21). Thus, the deliverance of creation itself from all the corrupting consequences of human sin as they have affected the creation will be as complete and as final as the deliverance from sin and its consequences are for God's people....Here again the apostle directs our attention to when this deliverance will be achieved: when 'the sons of God [are] revealed' (Rom. 8:19). That day of their 'revelation' [*apokalypsis*] as God's children is the glorious goal of the believers' expectation, and it is the goal of the creation's expectation also. At that time the creation itself 'will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God' (v. 21). The 'revealing of the sons of God' and 'the glorious freedom of the children of God' cannot be postponed beyond the coming of Christ and the resurrection, nor can the deliverance of creation be postponed beyond that great day.⁵⁰

Therefore, when "those who are Christ's" are resurrected "at His coming" (1 Cor 15:23), the cosmos itself will be re-created into the New Heavens and the New Earth.⁵¹ Scripture clearly reveals that Christ's *parousia* signals His return in glory, the destruction of His enemies (including death), the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, the destruction of the cosmos by fire, and the recreation of the cosmos into the New Heavens and New Earth. How, therefore, can there be a two-stage return of Christ followed by a literal, earthly millennium?

The Day of Christ

A fourth term which the Apostle Paul repeatedly uses as a synonym for *parousia* is the *Day of Christ*. This expression occurs with slight variations throughout the Pauline corpus: "day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:8), "day of our Lord Jesus" (2 Cor 1:14), "day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6), and "day of Christ" (Phil 1:10, 2:16). In 1 Corinthians 1:8, Paul declares, "Who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." Concerning this verse, MacArthur comments: "This refers to the coming of the Lord for His church, the Rapture (John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 3:10). This is to be distinguished from the Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 5:2, 4; 2 Thess. 2:2), a term referring to judgment on the ungodly."⁵² The Apostle states in 2 Corinthians 1:14, "Just as you also partially did understand us, that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus." MacArthur insists that this verse also refers to a pretribulation rapture.⁵³ In Philippians 1:6, Paul writes, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." MacArthur comments on this verse: "This phrase is not to be confused with the "Day of the Lord"... which describes final divine judgment and wrath (cf. Is. 13:9; Joel 1:15; 2:11; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Pet. 3:10). "Day of Jesus Christ" is also called the "day of Christ" (v. 10; 2:16) and the "day of our Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:8), which looks to the final salvation, reward, and

⁴⁹Robert Strimple, "Amillennialism," in *Three Views On The Millennium And Beyond*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 106.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 106.

⁵¹See Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 517. Moo, a Premillennialist, is convinced that this passage does not exclude the existence of a premillennial kingdom. See also Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2007), 64. Horner states, "Romans 8:22-33 clearly presents a similar prophetic vision that anticipates the future glorious Messianic kingdom which will manifest Christ's reign from Jerusalem over Jew and Gentile." While this passage is asserted to be consistent with a premillennial eschatology, it is certainly not clear which aspects logically lead to such a conclusion.

⁵²MacArthur, *MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1565.

⁵³*Ibid.*

glorification of believers.”⁵⁴ Philippians 1:10 proclaims, “So that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ,” while Philippians 2:16 declares, “Holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.”

The Dispensational interpretation that the *Day of Christ* refers to a pretribulation rapture is founded upon an argument of silence. Although it is true that there are no explicit references to judgment, unbelievers, or destruction in 1 Corinthians 1:8, 2 Corinthians 1:14, and Philippians 1:6; 1:10; 2:16, the burden of proof is on Dispensational Premillennialists to prove that the contexts of these passages *explicitly* teach a pretribulation rapture. Furthermore, there is *no explicit* contextual evidence in or around these verses to conclude that the *Day of Christ* is different from the *Day of the Lord*. In other words, the context of these verses does *not* demand or teach that the *Day of the Christ* is a pretribulation rapture. However, Dispensational Premillennialism, as a theological system, *does* demand such an interpretation. Again, one discovers that the Dispensational doctrine of a pretribulation rapture is derived from the silence of Scripture, not its *explicit* teaching.

Epiphaneia

Epiphaneia (ἐπιφανεῖα) is another Greek word that the New Testament authors frequently associated with Christ’s return, and it is from this word that our English word *epiphany* is derived. This particular word possesses the following meaning: “act of appearing, *appearance*.”⁵⁵ This section features a concise analysis of *four* passages of Scripture in which *epiphaneia* occurs: 2 Thessalonians 2:8, 1 Timothy 6:14, 2 Timothy 4, and Titus 2:13. Examining how this particular word functions contextually in each of these passages will certainly aid in determining the biblical teaching regarding Christ’s return.

2 Thessalonians 2:8

The Greek word *epiphaneia* appears once in Paul’s second epistle to the Thessalonians in connection with Christ’s return: 2 Thessalonians 2:8. This verse declares, “then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by *the appearance* [*tē epiphaneia*] of *His coming* [*tēs parousias autou*]” [**emphasis mine**]. 2 Thessalonians 2:8 teaches that Christ will destroy the Antichrist by the *epiphaneia* of His *parousía* (i.e. the appearance of His coming)! Clearly, the Apostle used both *epiphaneia* and *parousía* to refer to the same eschatological event: the Lord’s return in glory. Because Paul is the only New Testament to use the word *epiphaneia* in his writings, his close association of these two terms in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 has *significant* implications for other New Testament eschatological passages where the word appears.

1 Timothy 6:14

The Apostle Paul uses the Greek word *epiphaneia* once with reference to Christ’s return in his first epistle to Timothy. 1 Timothy 6:14 declares, “that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until *the appearing* [*tēs epiphaneias*] *of our Lord Jesus Christ*” [**emphasis mine**]. Dispensational Premillennialists usually teach that 1 Timothy 6:14 refers to a pretribulation rapture:

⁵⁴Ibid., 1711-2.

⁵⁵Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 386.

In connection with Paul's charge to Timothy to obey God and to have his testimony "without spot or blame" (v. 14), Paul viewed the Lord Jesus Christ as the final Judge of this situation who will judge Timothy at the time of His appearing. ***Though Christ will not appear to the entire world until the time of His second coming, He obviously will appear to those who are raptured in the period before these end-time events.*** At that time Timothy's exemplary life will be evaluated. The Christian life has its completion at the time of Christ's coming [**emphasis mine**].⁵⁶

The Dispensational interpretation of 1 Timothy 6:14 is built upon another argument from silence. In other words, because there is no **explicit** mention of glory, judgment, or unbelievers in this verse, this occurrence of *epiphaneia* refers to a pretribulation rapture. *However, the absence of any explicit reference to those topics does not justify understanding any particular verse as a reference to a pretribulation rapture.* It goes without saying that such conclusions are exegetically weak and rely on a markedly inconsistent interpretation of the word *epiphaneia*.⁵⁷

2 Timothy 4

The Greek word *epiphaneia* occurs twice in connection with Christ's return in 2 Timothy 4:1-8. This pericope of verses states:

I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by **His appearing** [*tēn epiphaneian*] and His kingdom: ²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. ³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; ⁴and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. ⁵But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. ⁶For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; ⁸in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved **His appearing** [*tēn epiphaneian autou*] [**emphasis mine**].

Dispensational Premillennialists typically maintain that both occurrences of *epiphaneia* in 2 Timothy 4:1-8 refer to a pretribulation rapture. For example, Walvoord writes, "In support of his solemn charge to Timothy to live for God, Paul called attention to the fact that Timothy would be judged by Jesus Christ at the time of His appearing. Though Paul speaks of the judgment of the living and dead as if they occur at the same time, Scriptures make clear that the dead will not be judged until the end of the millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:11-15)."⁵⁸ In other words, the judgment about which Paul reminds Timothy is the believers' judgment in heaven immediately after a pretribulation rapture, not the Final Judgment, which according to Dispensationalists occurs at the end of a literal, earthly millennium. However, such an understanding is read into the text, not derived from its explicit teaching. As

⁵⁶Walvoord, *Every Prophecy of the Bible*, 495.

⁵⁷See Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 165-6. Hoekema highlights the Dispensational interpretation of *epiphaneia*: "...No argument for the two-stage coming can be derived from the use of the New Testament words for the Second Coming.... The same thing is true of the use of the word *epiphaneia*. In I Timothy 6:14 it refers to what pretribulationists call the rapture: 'I charge you to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing (*epiphaneia*) of our Lord Jesus.'" But in II Thessalonians 2:8 Paul uses the same word to describe the coming of Christ at which he will overthrow the man of lawlessness: "And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall...bring to nought by the manifestation (*epiphaneia*) of his coming" (ASV). This will not happen, however, according to pretribulationists, until the end of the great tribulation."

⁵⁸Walvoord, *Every Prophecy of the Bible*, 496.

previously stated, the *parousia* signals Christ's return in glory, the destruction of His enemies (including death), the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked, the destruction of the cosmos by fire, and the recreation of the cosmos into the New Heavens and New Earth. Thus, both occurrences of *epiphaneia* in 2 Timothy 4:1-8 refer to Christ's one-stage coming and the subsequent Final Judgment at the end of the New Covenant Age.

Titus 2:13

The Apostle Paul uses the Greek word *epiphaneia* once with reference to Christ's return in his epistle to Titus. Titus 2:11-13 declares: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, ¹²instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, ¹³looking for the blessed hope and **appearing** [*epiphaneian*] of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus" [**emphasis mine**]. Many Dispensationalists insist that Titus 2:11-13 refers to a pretribulation rapture. For example, Walvoord states:

The epistle of Paul to Titus was largely concerned with pastoral counsel and advice as Titus was one of Paul's fellow workers. In appealing to Titus, Paul stated that the Gospel of salvation "teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (v. 12). As we live our lives in this world, we have a wonderful hope. As Paul expressed it, "while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (v. 13). ***This hope, obviously, is related to the Rapture of the church rather than the second coming of Christ to set up His kingdom, but the question has been raised as to why it is described as a "glorious appearing."*** At His second coming Jesus will appear in a glorious event described in Revelation 19:11-16, an event which all the world will see (1:7). ***On the other hand, the Rapture of the church is never described as visible to the world. The question therefore remains: How can the Rapture be described as a glorious event, as an event which reveals the glory of God? The answer is quite simple.... While the world will not see the glory at the time of the Rapture as they will at the time of the Second Coming, at the Rapture Christians will behold Him in His glory, and to them it will be a glorious appearing.*** As stated in 1 John 3:2, "What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" [**emphasis mine**].⁵⁹

This argument is built upon another argument from silence. Although there is no *explicit* reference to judgment or unbelievers in this verse, such a fact does *not* mandate that Titus 2:13 describe a pretribulation rapture. Because the Apostle Paul is the only New Testament writer to use *epiphaneia* in conjunction with Christ's return and because 2 Thessalonians 2:8, 1 Timothy 6:14, and 2 Timothy 4 refer to the *same* eschatological event, it is very unlikely that Titus 2:13 refers to a pretribulation rapture.

Some Dispensationalists believe that this particular verse justifies their teaching that the return of Christ will occur in two distinct phases: "the blessed hope," referring to a pretribulation rapture, and "the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus," referring to Christ's glorious Second Coming. Tim LaHaye advocates this interpretation:

In Titus 2:13, Paul issues a hard-hitting challenge to God's people to live a holy, and godly life. Part of that appeal is based on the Second Coming of our Lord: "looking for the *blessed hope* and *glorious appearing* of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (emphasis mine)...***The Blessed Hope is definitely a reference to the Rapture of the church. Examined from every angle, the Rapture, immediately following the resurrection of dead believers, is the Blessed Hope of the church.*** As we have already

⁵⁹Ibid., 496-7. See also MacArthur, *MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1824.

noted, our confident expectation is that one day we will be translated to be with Christ before the time of wrath begins....*The Rapture is truly a Blessed Hope of the church....The Glorious Appearing is quite a different matter. It heralds that special day when Christ will return to this earth in triumph to be acknowledged by all men as KING OF KINGS and LORD OF LORDS. The Glorious Appearing is the literal, physical stage of the Second Coming, the coming of the church to the earth. The Rapture is His return for the Church. Both appear in Titus 2:13, which refers in a single verse to the Rapture as the “blessed hope,” and the coming to earth as the “glorious appearing.”*⁶⁰

Such a conclusion, however, violates the rules of Greek grammar and *cannot* be viewed as a sound interpretation of the text. The specific rule of grammar which Dispensationalists ignore in this particular case is the Granville Sharp rule. Daniel Wallace defines this rule with the following words:

In Greek, when two nouns are connected by *καί* and the article precedes only the first noun, there is a close connection between the two. That connection always indicates at least some sort of *unity*. At a higher level, it may connote *equality*. At the highest level it may indicate *identity*. When the construction meets three specific demands, then the two nouns *always* refer to the same person. When the construction does not meet these requirements, the noun may or may not refer to the same person(s) / objects(s).⁶¹

The Greek text from which the phrase “the blessed hope and appearing of the glory” is translated is *tēn makarian elpida kai epiphaneian tēs doxēs* (την μακαριαν ἐλπίδα ἐπιφανειαν της δοξης). The two singular nouns *elpida* (“hope”) and *epiphaneian* (“appearing”) are linked by the connective conjunction *kai* (“and”) and also share the definite article *tēn* which occurs before the noun *elpida*. As a result, there is a close connection between both “the blessed hope” and “the glorious appearing.” Some Dispensational Premillennialists may attempt to argue that the close connection between these two nouns lies in the fact that they are two separate phases of Christ’s return. However, such a conclusion is **not** demanded from the text and results from eisogeting Dispensational presuppositions into the text. Based off the conclusions already established regarding the words *parousía*, *apokalypsis*, and *epiphaneia*, it is best to understand “the blessed hope” and “the appearing of the glory” in Titus 2:13 as two aspects of the **same, one-stage** return of Christ.

Sunteleia

Sunteleia (συντέλεια) is a Greek word that the Apostle Matthew associated with Christ’s *parousía*. This term indicates “a point of time marking completion of a duration, *completion, close, end.*”⁶² Whenever Matthew employs *sunteleia* in conjunction with the Lord’s return, the word occurs with a second Greek word: *aiōnos* (αἰωνος). Whenever *aiōn* (αἰών) occurs with *sunteleia*, it carries the following meaning: “a segment of time as a particular unit of history, *age.*”⁶³ Thus, *sunteleia aiōnos* is accurately translated “end of the age.” This section features a concise analysis of *three* passages from Matthew’s Gospel in which “end of the age” occurs: Matthew 24, Matthew 13:36-50, and Matthew 28:18-20. Examining how this particular word functions in each of these passages will certainly aid in determining the biblical teaching regarding Christ’s return.

⁶⁰Tim LaHaye, *Rapture Under Attack* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1998), 76-79.

⁶¹Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond The Basics*, 270.

⁶²Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 974.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 32.

Matthew 24

End of the age (*sunteleias tou aiōnos*) occurs once in Matthew's version of the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24-25), which is Christ's teaching regarding His return. Recall that the discourse begins in Matthew 24:3 with **two** questions which the disciples ask the Lord Jesus: "Tell us, when will these things be [referring to Jesus' prophecy of the Temple's destruction], and what *will be* the sign of Your coming [*tēs sēs parousía*] and of the end of the age [*sunteleias tou aiōnos*]?" Although most English translations *appear* to record the disciples asking Jesus *three* questions in Matthew 24:3, the Granville Sharp rule of Greek grammar allows for only **two**.⁶⁴ The Greek text from which the phrase "what *will be* the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?" is translated is *ti to sēmeion tēs sēs parousía kai sunteleias tou aiōnos* (τί τὸ σημεῖον τῆς σῆς παρουσίας καὶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος). The two singular nouns *parousía* ("coming") and *συντελείας* ("end") are linked by the connective conjunction *kai* ("and") and also share the definite article *tēs* which occurs before the noun *parousía*. As a result, there is a close connection between both "**the** your coming" and "end of the age." Furthermore, the grammar of Matthew 24:3 indicates that the singular noun *sēmeion* ("the sign") refers to both *parousía* ("coming") and *συντελείας* ("end"). Therefore, it is best to understand "**the** your coming" and "end of the age" as being triggered by the **same** sign and occurring at the **same** time.

Matthew 24:3 is not the only Scriptural passage which connects Christ's return with the *end of the age*. The Apostle Paul associates the "end" with Christ's return in both 1 Corinthians 1:7-8 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 51-57. In 1 Corinthians 1:7-8, Paul writes, "So that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly **the revelation** [*tēn apokalupsin* – a synonym of *parousía*] **of our Lord Jesus Christ**,⁸ who shall also confirm you to **the end** [*telous*], blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." In 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 51-57, the Apostle teaches that the *parousía* is "the end" (1 Cor 15:24), when Death is destroyed:

²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's **at His coming** [*tē parousía autou*], ²⁴then comes **the end** [*telos*], when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. ²⁶The last enemy that will be abolished is death [**emphasis mine**].

Thus, the Apostle Matthew is not the only New Testament writer to Christ's return with the *end* or *end of the age*. Christ's *parousía* clearly signals the *end of the age*, removing **any** possibility for a two-stage return of Christ or a literal, earthly millennium.

Matthew 13:36-50

End of the age occurs three times in Matthew 13:36-50, a Scripture passage which records not only Jesus' explanation of the Parable of the Wheat and Tares but also the parables of the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price, and the dragnet. Matthew 13:36-42 states:

Then He left the multitudes, and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field."³⁷ And He answered and said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man,³⁸ and the field is the world; and *as for* the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one;³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is **the end of the age** [*sunteleia aiōnos*]; and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Therefore just as the

⁶⁴See Footnote 4 for a detailed description of the Granville Sharp rule.

tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at **the end of the age** [*tē sunteleia tou aiōnos*].⁴¹The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness,⁴²and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth [**emphasis mine**].

Notice that when the *end of the age* occurs, “The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 13:39-40). Three points must be emphasized. *First*, recall that Matthew 24:3 teaches that Christ’s *parousia* signals the *end of the age*. *Second*, Matthew 13:39 mirrors Matthew 24:31 in terms of phraseology, indicating that these two passages describe two aspects of the *same* event: Christ’s *parousia*. Observe the similarities between Matthew 13:36-43 and Matthew 24:27-31:

Matthew 13:36-42: Then He left the multitudes, and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.”³⁷ And He answered and said, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man,³⁸ and the field is the world; and *as for* the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one;³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is **the end of the age** [*sunteleia aiōnos*]; and the reapers are angels.⁴⁰ Therefore just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at **the end of the age** [*tē sunteleia tou aiōnos*].⁴¹ The Son of Man **will send forth His angels** [*apostelei...tous angelous autou*], and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness,⁴² and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.⁴³ Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear [**emphasis mine**].

Matthew 24:27-31: For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall **the coming** [*hē parousia*] **of the Son of Man** be....²⁹ But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken,³⁰ and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.³¹ And **He will send forth His angels** [*apostelei tous angelous autou*] with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other [**emphasis mine**].

Matthew 13:39 teaches that Christ will send forth His angels at His *parousia* at the *end of the age* to gather all unbelievers for judgment, whereas Matthew 24:31 teaches that Christ will send forth His angels at His *parousia* at the *end of the age* to gather all His elect for glory. Thus, these two passages describe two aspects of Christ’s *parousia*.

Third, the gathering of unbelievers for judgment at Christ’s *parousia* at the *end of the age* indicates that the Great White Throne Judgment occurs at the *end of the age*. As Revelation 20:11-15 demonstrates, unbelievers are consigned to the lake of fire **after** the Final Judgment:

¹¹And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. ¹³And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. ¹⁴And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

This passage in Revelation implies that the unbelieving dead are sent to Hades (cf. Luke 16:19-31) until the Final Judgment, then judged, and then eternally consigned to the lake of fire. Christ's brief explanation of the judgment at the *end of the age* in Matthew 13:36-43 is later expanded in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 25:31-46:

³¹***But when the Son of Man comes in His glory***, and all the angels with Him, ***then He will sit on His glorious throne*** [literally “the throne of His glory” – a reference to Christ’s heavenly throne, which is also the Great White Judgment Throne]. ³²And all the nations [including Israel] will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; ³³and He will put the sheep [i.e. believers, cf. John 10:1-21] on His right, and the goats on the left. ³⁴Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; ³⁶naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ ³⁷Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink?’ ³⁸‘And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You?’ ³⁹‘And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ ⁴⁰And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers⁶⁵ [believers, cf. Matt 12:50] of Mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to Me.’ ⁴¹***Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;*** ⁴²for I was hungry, and you gave Me *nothing* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; ⁴³I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’ ⁴⁴Then they themselves also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’ ⁴⁵Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ ⁴⁶***And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life [emphasis mine].***

Both Revelation 20:11-15 and Matthew 25:31-46 confirm the teaching of Matthew 13:36-42 that the Great White Throne Judgment occurs immediately after Christ’s *parousia* at the *end of the age*.

End of the age occurs a third time Matthew 13:36-50, specifically the forty-ninth verse. Matthew 13:44-50 declares:

⁴⁴The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field. ⁴⁵Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, ⁴⁶and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it. ⁴⁷Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering *fish* of every kind; ⁴⁸and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down, and gathered the good *fish* into containers, but the bad they threw away. ⁴⁹So it will be at ***the end of the age*** [*tē sunteleia tou aiōnos*]; ***the angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous,*** ⁵⁰***and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth [emphasis mine].***

⁶⁵Many Dispensationalists believe that the phrase “brothers of Mine” in Matthew 25:40 refers to the Jewish race, not believing Christians. See Walvoord, *Every Prophecy of the Bible*, 398. Walvoord comments on Matthew 25:31-46: “This judgment relating to the Gentiles at the time of the Second Coming is revealed only here in Scripture. Premillenarians interpret this judgment as determining who among the Gentiles will enter the millennial kingdom. The basis for the judgment is how they treated Christ’s brethren, the Jews, as a token of their faith or lack of it.” Such an interpretation disregards Matthew 12:50, which states, “For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.” In light of Matthew 12:50, Matthew 25:40 is **not** teaching that Christ’s brothers are merely His ethnic relatives, but that believers, comprised of elect Jew and elect Gentile, are His brothers.

This occurrence of *end of the age* also teaches that the Great White Throne Judgment occurs immediately after Christ's *parousía* at the *end of the age*.

Conclusion

Does the Bible teach a two-stage *parousía* with a pretribulation rapture of the Church followed by the Lord's Second Coming in glory? *Indeed, it does not.* The Dispensational doctrine of a pretribulation rapture is derived from the silence of Scripture, not its *explicit* teaching. Although it is true that none of the passages, purported to teach a pretribulation rapture, contain an *explicit* reference to unbelievers, judgment, torment, punishment, or glory, the burden of proof is on Dispensational Premillennialists to prove that the contexts of these passages *explicitly* teach a pretribulation rapture. *The absence of any explicit reference to those topics neither legitimately nor logically justifies understanding any of those verses as a reference to a pretribulation rapture.* As demonstrated above, the Dispensational doctrine of a pretribulation rapture is also founded upon a *significantly* inconsistent interpretation of the Greek words *parousía*, *Day of the Lord*, *apokalypsis*, *Day of Christ*, *epiphaneia*, and *sunteleia*. A contextual analysis of each occurrence where these six terms are used with reference to Christ's return *strongly* teaches that Christ's *parousía* is not only a *one-stage* event but also the climactic event of all redemptive history.⁶⁶

Christ's *parousía* is *the* "blessed hope" which all New Covenant believers await with eager expectation (1 Cor 1:7-9; Titus 2:13). Christ's *one-stage* return will be preceded great apostasy (2 Thess 2:3; cf. Rev 20:7-9; Luke 18:8), the appearance of the final Antichrist (2 Thess 2:3; cf. Rev 20:7-9), a period of unprecedented tribulation (Matt 24:29), a massive ingathering of believing ethnic Jews into the church (Rom 9-11), and terrifying cosmic signs (Matt 24:29, 2 Pet 3:10-12; Rev 6:12-14). Christ's *parousía* will be sudden (Matt 24:37-39), unexpected (Matt 24:37-39), unmistakable (Matt 24:27), universally visible (Matt 24:30; 2 Thess 2:8; 1 Cor 1:7-8), characterized by great glory, (Matt 24:30, 2 Thess 1:7-10), and accompanied by His elect angels (Matt 24:31, 2 Thess 1:7-10, 1 Thess 4:15-17). When the Lord Jesus Christ returns, He will *simultaneously* grant relief for the righteous and destroy the wicked (Matt 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-27; 28-30). With regard to the elect, Christ will visibly descend from heaven (1 Thess 4:16), sound the trumpet of God (Matt 24:31; 1 Corinthians 15:51-57; 1 Thess 4:15-17), and resurrect His people (1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 51-57). He will resurrect *all* dead believers first (1 Thess 4:16) then *all* living believers (1 Thess 4:17), send His angels to gather His elect "from one end of the sky to the other" (Matt 24:31; 2 Thess 2:1; 1 Thess 4:15-17), and finally return with "all His saints" (1 Thess 3:13). However, Christ will destroy the final Antichrist (2 Thess 2:8) and all unbelievers (Rev 19:11-21), who will be filled with overwhelming terror, panic, and grief (Matt 24:30; Rev 6:15-17). Furthermore, Christ's *parousía* is *the* end of the New Covenant age (Matt 13:36-50; 24:3; 1 Cor 1:7-9; 15:20-28, 51-57) when the cosmos is destroyed by fire (2 Peter 3:10-12), when the Final Judgment is executed (1 Cor 15:20-28, 51-57; Rev 20:12-14; Matt 13:36-50; 25:31-46), when Death is destroyed (1 Cor 15:20-28, 51-57; Rev 20:12-14), and when the cosmos is recreated into the New Heavens and New Earth (Rom 8:19-23; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Rev 21-22).

⁶⁶Although this paper does not specifically address a pre-wrath rapture, a mid-tribulation rapture, or a partial rapture, the contextual analysis of the six terms (*parousía*, *Day of the Lord*, *apokalypsis*, *Day of Christ*, *epiphaneia*, and *sunteleia*) found in this paper refutes these rapture teachings as well.

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