

RESCUED FROM THE WRATH OF GOD:  
THE CHURCH'S HOPE OF ESCAPING THE DAY OF THE LORD  
AS A CASE FOR A PRETRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE

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## Introduction

Pretribulationism can be defined as “the eschatological system within premillennialism that teaches that Jesus Christ will rapture away His church before the future seven-year tribulation begins.”<sup>1</sup> The case for a pretribulation rapture is multi-faceted and includes several exegetical and theological arguments.

However, one argument that is perhaps the most effective at making the case for a pretribulation rapture has to do with the church’s relationship to the wrath of God during the tribulation period. Paul Feinberg keenly points out that among the various rapture views, “there is general agreement with regard to the principle that God has promised the church exemption from divine wrath.”<sup>2</sup> However, Feinberg goes on to summarize the issue by noting that, “the disagreement arises as to the time that divine wrath commences and as to the method of divine protection.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus this paper will seek first, to establish that the biblical promise to the church of exemption from the divine wrath of the tribulation involves *removal* of the church prior to the seven-year tribulation, then to demonstrate that the day of the Lord and thus God’s divine wrath *begins* at the start of the tribulation period and continues throughout the seven years. If the church has been promised exemption from the wrath of the tribulation by removal and if that wrath begins at the inception of the seven-years, then a pretribulation rapture must be affirmed.

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<sup>1</sup> Larry D. Pettegrew, “Interpretive Flaws in the Olivet Discourse,” *TMSJ* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 187.

<sup>2</sup> Paul D. Feinberg, “The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture Position,” in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation*, ed. Gleason L. Archer, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 58.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

## **The Promise of Exemption From the Wrath of God**

Scripture clearly teaches that the church will be exempted not only from the wrath of God but from the “hour of testing” or seven-year tribulation period that is coming upon the entire world. This is affirmed in passages like 1 Thessalonians 1:10, 5:9 and Revelation 3:10 which claim a preservation from the coming wrath by means of removal.

### 1 Thessalonians 1:10

Most pretribulationists consider 1 Thessalonians 1:10 as a promise of rescue from the coming eschatological wrath of God in the tribulation. Although some see an allusion to eternal wrath in the lake of fire, there are several reasons for rejecting this view and affirming an understanding of tribulation wrath. First, the context of much of 1 Thessalonians is eschatological and filled with eschatological references as seen in the *parousia* passages of 2:19, 3:13, and 5:23, the rapture discourse of 4:13–18, and the discussion concerning the day of the Lord in 5:1–11.

Second, the context of verse 10 is eschatological and speaks of the Thessalonians’ waiting for Jesus’ appearing “from heaven.” This waiting (*ἀναμένω*) denotes a “looking forward to the coming of one whose arrival was anticipated at any time,” and its present tense points to the Thessalonians’ understanding of an appearing that could occur at any time and might very well come in their lifetime.<sup>4</sup>

Third, the phrase “from heaven” (lit., out of the heavens) further strengthens the concept of the physical appearing of Jesus and though not explicitly stated, most likely refers to the rapture when Christ will appear from heaven in a cloud to catch up (*ἄρπάζω*) the church saints to

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<sup>4</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Rev. ed. (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1992), 72.

Himself (1 Thess. 4:17). This view is not far-fetched since Paul’s use of the plural “heavens” invokes the Hebrew notion of **הַשָּׁמַיִם** which picture the sky above.<sup>5</sup>

Fourth, it is Jesus who “rescues” (**ῥύομαι**) the Thessalonians from the coming wrath. The use of **ῥύομαι** instead of **σῶζω** is significant. It denotes “to rescue from danger” and thus to “deliver.”<sup>6</sup> In the other uses of **ῥύομαι**, the overwhelming idea is deliverance or rescue of believers from earthly situations, be it Satan (Matt. 6:13), enemies (Luke 1:74), perverse and evil men (2 Thess. 3:2), persecutions and sufferings (2 Tim. 3:11), evil deeds (2 Tim. 4:18), God’s divine judgment upon Sodom (2 Pet. 2:7), or temptation (2 Pet. 2:9). Thus a soteriological salvation from eternal wrath is not in view here, but instead a deliverance from the coming tribulation wrath of God’s judgment (cf. 2 Pet. 2:7, 9). The rescuing “from” (**ἐκ**) wrath points to a deliverance “away from” wrath that connotes “separation,” emphasizing the “place or thing from which separation takes place.”<sup>7</sup>

Fifth, in this context, the deliverance and rescuing from wrath is tied to the appearing of Jesus. It is when Jesus appears that the rescuing will take place. This view is strengthened by the occurrence of **ῥύομαι** as a present participle. Had Paul wanted to stress a soteriological salvation, he could have used the aorist or perfect to refer back to the cross and the saving power of the atonement. However, his use of the present, occurring in this eschatological context

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Walter, Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilber Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd Ed., Rev. and ed. by Frederick William Danker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 907.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 295.

functions with a future force, points to a soon coming deliverance that is directly related to Christ's visible appearing.

Sixth, this wrath is “the coming” (ἐρχομαι) wrath. The verb speaks of “events or situations” whose coming “are connected with a certain time.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the present participle denotes not only its certainty but imminence.<sup>9</sup> Hence, it is more likely an impending tribulational wrath that will appear like a “thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2), than the eternal wrath that they have already been saved from.

It is significant to note that the promise of rescue from tribulation wrath made here in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 is a promise given to “us” (ἡμᾶς). That is, it is a promise to a group that consisted of both Paul and the Thessalonians, namely the church. Since the wrath envisioned here is eschatological, tribulation wrath, the promise of rescue is a promise made only to the church of escape from the imminent wrath about to come upon the whole world.

#### 1 Thessalonians 5:9

Several key clues point to the fact that tribulation wrath is also in view here in 1 Thessalonians 5:9. First, the context of 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 sets up a theme and chronology of eschatological events. Paul begins by speaking concerning the rapture of the saints in chapter 4 then naturally moves into an exhortation and encouragement in chapter 5 by speaking concerning the DOL which those Thessalonians who are believers (“sons of light and day”) will not experience.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 394.

<sup>9</sup> Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 111.

Second, the context of 5:1–11 is the “times and epochs” of the eschaton, specifically the future DOL. That the wrath and judgment associated with the DOL are in view is clear from Paul’s descriptions of “destruction” (ὄλεθρος) which will come upon the unbelieving world suddenly, painfully, and inescapably (v. 3). Nevertheless, this coming day of wrath and judgment is not to be feared by the “we” (ἡμεῖς) since they are not of the darkness so as to be overtaken (v. 4) but are of the day (v. 8) and have not been appointed for this tribulation wrath but for obtaining salvation via Jesus Christ (v. 9).

Third, the term “obtain” (περιποίησις) “points to that which” the church “will gain when the day of the Lord arrives.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, it affirms that church saints “will not have part in the coming Great Tribulation, when God’s wrath falls upon a Christ-rejecting world (Rev. 6:15–17; 14:10; 19:15).”<sup>11</sup>

Fourth, verse 10, strengthens the argument of salvation as deliverance from tribulation wrath by alluding back to rapture language of 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. Regardless of whether the Thessalonians are “alive [awake] or asleep” at the coming of Christ in the rapture, they will live together with Him.<sup>12</sup> The aorist ζήσωμεν (“live”) hints at always being “with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17), so that “whatever be our state when Christ comes again, we will live with him.”<sup>13</sup>

Once more, as in 1 Thessalonians 1:10, we observe a promise to the church of salvation from the wrath of the DOL during the tribulation period via Jesus at His coming in the rapture.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>11</sup> Hiebert, 238.

<sup>12</sup> Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 188–89.

<sup>13</sup> Leon Morris, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC, Rev. ed. (1984. Reprint, Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 101.

## Revelation 3:10

Revelation 3:10 is “the most debated verse in the whole discussion about the time of the Church’s rapture” because it determines “whether the exemption will come by preservation or prior removal.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, The real issue is the type of protection being promised.

Pretribulationists affirm a promise of *external* protection that thus would necessitate removal from the hour of testing while posttribulationists affirm an *internal* protection that involves preservation through that hour.<sup>15</sup> There are convincing reasons for believing that external preservation by removal is here in promised to the church.

Much of the debate over the type of preservation revolves around the preposition “from” (ἐκ). Gundry notes the meaning of ἐκ is “out from within” and connotes “the basic idea of emergence” and not “a stationary position outside of its object.”<sup>16</sup> According to Gundry, “if ἐκ ever occurs without the thought of emergence, it does so very exceptionally.”<sup>17</sup> However, Townsend has, through a diachronic study of classical, LXX, and Koine usage, convincingly demonstrated that ἐκ can also include the idea of “*a position outside its object with no thought of prior existence within the object or of emergence from the object.*”<sup>18</sup> This understanding is

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<sup>14</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation: A Biblical Examination of Posttribulationism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 54–55.

<sup>15</sup> Paul D. Feinberg, 63.

<sup>16</sup> Gundry, 55.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey L. Townsend, “The Rapture in Revelation 3:10,” in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), 370. Italics in the original.

further strengthened “when used with τηρέω, a verb which has no indication of motion.”<sup>19</sup> Still, one significant NT text remains to be dealt with.

John 17:15 is the only other New Testament example of τηρέω used with ἐκ and is used by posttribulationists to determine the meaning of Revelation 3:10. “Gundry interprets John 17:15b as a prayer for the preservation of the disciples *in* the moral sphere of Satan, since they are to be left in the world (John 17:15a).”<sup>20</sup> However, it is not the moral sphere of Satan that is here in described but more specifically the “evil one” himself. Just as the church at Philadelphia was to be kept out of the “hour of testing,” an hour in which they were not currently in because it had not yet come, so also “the disciples spiritually were *not* in the Evil One when Jesus prayed,” thus requiring “the ἐκ of 17:15b to be understood as preservation in a position outside of the preposition’s object.”<sup>21</sup> The disciples had already been delivered from the Satan’s “domain of darkness” (Col. 1:13). Consequently, Jesus was praying that they be kept *away from* the Devil himself, a prayer that is answered according to 1 John 5:18 in that the evil one is not able to touch the one born of God since He “keeps him” (τηρέω). The same cannot be said of the unbelieving “world” which lies “in” (ἐν) the sphere of the evil one (1 John 5:19).

It is significant to note the recipients of the promise of exemption. The *church* at Philadelphia is given the promise. Although some would see this as a pledge limited to this congregation, this should be rejected since the intended audience consists of those who have ears to hear “what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). “By means of

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas R. Edgar, “Robert H. Gundry and Revelation 3:10,” *GTJ* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 47.

<sup>20</sup> Townsend, 375.

<sup>21</sup> Paul D. Feinberg, 67; See also David G. Winfrey, “The Great Tribulation: Kept “Out of” or “Through”?” *GTJ* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 3–18.

this call the message to a single congregation is extended to all the churches of Asia and through them, as representatives, to the church throughout the world.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the promise of exemption from hour of God’s coming wrath is given only to the church and does not include tribulation saints.

Also significant is the fact that the promise in Revelation 3:10 is not a preservation from trials and testing but from *the hour* of testing and thus “in relation to a *specific period of time*.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, “the promise was to be kept from “the hour” of trial, not just the trials in the hour”<sup>24</sup> and implies not partial but complete deliverance. This coming hour refers to the future, universal outpouring of God’s wrath during the seven-year tribulation period (Deut 4:39–30; Jer. 30:7; Dan. 9:27; 11:36–45; 12:1) which is coming upon the whole world. It coincides with the beginning of Daniel’s seventieth week and the breaking of the seals in Revelation 6:1. Thomas notes that, “it is the time known to the Jews as the “Messianic woes,” foretold in the visions beginning in Revelation 4 as coming upon the whole world. It is to be a time of distress on the world before the coming of Christ, one known as the Day of the Lord.”<sup>25</sup>

### Summary

The exegetical data affirms a promise specifically to the *church* (not tribulation saints) of exemption from coming tribulation wrath and from the time period of that wrath. It is a promise of *removal* by keeping the church from the tribulation “hour of testing” (Rev. 3:10) that is

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<sup>22</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary*, ed. Kenneth Barker (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1992), 150.

<sup>23</sup> Townsend, 376.

<sup>24</sup> John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (1957, Reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 70.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 289.

coming upon the whole world, which is the period of the outpouring of the “wrath of God” (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9).

This promise of removal from the tribulation period and God’s coming wrath, in and of itself, does not determine the timing of the rapture. In order to do that, one must demonstrate the commencement of the pouring out of God’s wrath.

### **The Nature and Commencement of God’s Wrath**

That divine wrath is coming upon the world at the end of the age is affirmed by the various rapture views and more importantly in Scripture. More specifically, this divine wrath will be poured out during the seven-year tribulation period of Daniel’s seventieth week. Though non-pretribulationists are determined to limit the commencement of divine wrath to the latter portion of the tribulation period, a proper understanding of the day of the Lord demonstrates that it, and thus divine wrath, begins at the start of the seven-year tribulation period.

#### **The Nature of the Day of the Lord**

“The Day of the Lord refers to God’s special interventions into the course of world events to judge His enemies, accomplish His purpose for history, and thereby demonstrate who He is – the Sovereign God of the universe.”<sup>26</sup>

“The Bible indicates that there have been several Days of the Lord in the past in which God demonstrated His sovereign rule by raising up several nations to execute His judgment on

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<sup>26</sup> Renald E. Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!: A Definitive Study of the Rapture of the Church* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1995), 30.

other nations.”<sup>27</sup> Examples would include Assyria who conquered the northern kingdom of Israel (Amos 5:18, 20) and Babylon who took the southern kingdom captive (Zeph. 2:2).

However, the Scriptures tell of a future, eschatological day of the Lord (hereafter, DOL) wherein unprecedented global judgment will take place (Isa. 2:10–22; 34:1–8; Oba. 1:15; Joel 3:1–6; Zech. 14; 1 Thess. 5:1–11). It will be a period of time which, like a literal day (יָמִים), includes a “darkness of divine wrath” and “the light of divine blessing.”<sup>28</sup> Most among the various rapture views affirm that the DOL will include a time of judgment and wrath accomplished during the tribulation period as well as a time of outpoured blessing and restoration which will be realized at the Messianic kingdom of the millennium.

The purpose of the divine wrath and punishment of the DOL is to judge rebellious humanity (Isa. 2:12–22; 13:6–13; 34:1–8; Ezek. 30:1–9; Joel 1:15–20; 2:11; Obad. 1:10–20; Zeph. 1:1–6; 14–18; 1 Thess. 5:1–11; 2 Thess. 2:1–12) and to chasten unbelieving Israel (Jer. 30:11; Joel 2:1–11; 3:14–17; Amos 5:18–24; Zeph. 1:7–13; Mal. 3:1–5; 4:1–3), through catastrophic disasters, wars, persecutions, evil powers, and the Antichrist, a collective force all of which will be felt by those alive during the seven-year period. Indeed, Van Kampen declares, “the wrath of God will be played out during a specific time period called *the Day of the Lord*.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, God’s divine wrath and judgment cannot be divorced from the DOL.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>28</sup> Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (1974, Reprint, Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1992), 178.

<sup>29</sup> Robert D. Van Kampen, *The Rapture Question Answered Plain and Simple* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1997), 52.

What many fail to recognize is that like the tribulation,<sup>30</sup> the coming DOL is both broad and narrow. The narrow DOL refers to a literal, 24-hour day in which Christ will return to earth in order execute judgment on the nations.<sup>31</sup> This narrow DOL is called “the great and terrible day of the Lord” (Mal. 4:5), and referred to in Joel 3:9–16, Zechariah 14:1–5, and Matthew 24:29–30. “Both Joel 3 and Zechariah 14 indicate that their Day of the Lord will be the specific time when Messiah comes to fight against and destroy the armies gathered in Israel. Revelation 19:11–21 says that time will be when Christ comes from heaven to the earth.”<sup>32</sup> It is this narrow DOL that follows the great tribulation (24:15–26) and the coming of Elijah (Mal. 4:5), and that occurs in the latter part of Daniel’s seventieth week. Thus, it is this narrow DOL that non-pretribulationists have in mind when they argue their rapture position. It is understandable, then, why they cannot affirm a DOL that begins at the start of Daniel’s seventieth week.

On the other hand, the broad DOL is recognized by many pretribulationists and affirmed in scripture as a period of time that begins at the start of Daniel’s seventieth week and the seven-year tribulation period. It’s beginning is thus concurrent with the breaking of the first seal by the Lamb in Revelation 6:1. This broad DOL is the period which spans to the end of the tribulation period and into the beginning of the millennium, and that will characterized the entire tribulation

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<sup>30</sup> Although non-pretribulationists reluctantly employ the terms *tribulation* and *tribulation period* to denote the seven-year period of Daniel’s seventieth week, they prefer to restrict the term to identify that intense persecution witnessed in the second half of the seven-year period.<sup>30</sup> Pretribulationists recognize both the broad tribulation period of Daniel’s seventieth week (Dan. 9:27) revealed in Revelation 6–19, yet distinguish it from this intense persecution known as the “great tribulation,” referred to as the “time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7), and spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 24:15–26.

<sup>31</sup> Showers, 35–37.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

period as a time of God's divine wrath. The question remains, where does Scripture teach the commencement of the broad DOL?

### The Commencement of the Day of the Lord

The various rapture views differ as to the inauguration and duration of the DOL. Even among pretribulationists, there are those who maintain that the commencement of the DOL coincides with the beginning of the tribulation period, and those, like Paul D. Feinberg, who concede to a posttribulationist understanding of the DOL as occurring during the latter part of Daniel's seventieth week.<sup>33</sup> In so doing, Feinberg and other pretribulationists can still make a case for a pretribulation rapture but have unnecessarily given up biblical ground in regard to the beginning of the DOL as an argument for the presence of God's divine wrath at the start of the tribulation. Interestingly, Rosenthal is much more critical of those like Feinberg, noting that "if the Rapture is pretribulationist, the Day of the Lord must commence with the beginning of the seventieth week."<sup>34</sup> Indeed, there are several ways the Scriptures prove that it does.

1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 is a commentary on the broad DOL, with Paul reaffirming what he had already taught the Thessalonians concerning that day (1 Thess. 1:1–2). The passage demonstrates three truths about the DOL that point to its commencement at the beginning of Daniel's seventieth week. First, He states that the DOL will come unexpectedly like a "thief in the night" (1 Thess. 1:2). It will thus catch the unbelieving world off guard and by surprise. This fact is difficult to harmonize with the narrow DOL which would have been preceded by the

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<sup>33</sup> Paul D. Feinberg, 61.

<sup>34</sup> Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church: A New Understanding of the Rapture, the Tribulation, and the Second Coming* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), 139.

war, famine, pestilence, earthquakes, the rise of the Antichrist, cosmic disturbances and the Great Tribulation which collectively would have already destroyed millions of earth's inhabitants. In addition, "Paul's point—the unsaved will be given no forewarning of the coming of the broad Day of the Lord—rules out any of the seals of Revelation as being fore-warnings of the beginning of the broad Day."<sup>35</sup> It argues then for a commencement of the DOL at the beginning not end of the tribulation period.

Second, Paul affirms the DOL will come at a time when people are saying "peace and safety." Again, this will be time in which no tribulation effects have been felt. It will be a time that can be characterized as stable and normal. The Greek term for "safety" (ἀσφάλεια) speaks of a legal safety often provided through a "written security."<sup>36</sup> It is an assurance of "security from enemies and dangers."<sup>37</sup> This time of supposed peace and safety coincides with Daniel 9:27 which speaks of the Antichrist who will make a covenant with the nation of Israel, among other things promising peace and safety including the right to repossess the Jerusalem temple for worship and sacrifice. It also falls in line with Revelation 6:1 which speaks of the first seal unleashing the white horse whose rider "must be someone resembling the Messiah."<sup>38</sup> The fact that he will come 'conquering and to conquer' points to "the rider's career as one marked by a long series of victories."<sup>39</sup> This also accords well with Matthew 24:4–5 which states that part of

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<sup>35</sup> Showers, 60.

<sup>36</sup> G. Milligan, and James H. Moulton, *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (1930. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 88.

<sup>37</sup> Carl Ludwig Wilibald Grimm, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. Joseph Henry Thayer (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 82.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas, Revelation 1–7, 422.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 424.

the Antichrist's success will be in misleading many. Revelation 6:4 declares that the second seal sets free the red horse and its rider "to whom it "was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another."

Third, the beginning of the DOL will be characterized by a destruction from which the unbelieving world 'will not escape' since it is brought on by the Lord. This destruction will be sudden like the labor pains of a woman. "Isaiah 13:6–13 and Zephaniah 1:14–18 associate birth pangs with the divine wrath and fierce anger of the Day of the Lord."<sup>40</sup> This is significant since a description of events in Matt. 24:5–8 given by Jesus, including false-messiahs, wars, famines, and earthquakes is also regarded as "the beginning of birth pangs" (Matt. 24:8). Telling is the fact that this list coincides exactly with seals of Revelation 6. Thomas notes, "the equation of the seals with Matt. 24:6–14 is correct."<sup>41</sup> Thus, it must be affirmed that the broad DOL commences with the breaking of the first seal in Revelation 6 and unleashes the pouring out of the wrath of God. This view is strengthened by the fact that the Lamb, Christ Himself, is the one who initiates the breaking of the seals and sets in motion the judgments which are to follow. Non-pretribulationists often point to Revelation 6:16–17 to refute the notion of divine wrath in the first five seals by affirming that the phrase "the great day of their wrath has come" carries an ingressive force. However, "the verb in Rev. 6:17 must be a constative aorist looking back in time to the point in the past when the great day of wrath arrived."<sup>42</sup> Thus it is after enduring the devastating effects of six seals, that rebellious man recognizes the judgments as coming from the

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<sup>40</sup> Showers, 27.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas, Revelation 1–7, 416.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 460.

hand of God and tries frantically to hide himself all the while pleading for the earth to destroy him.

What must be remembered is that the breaking of the second seal and the removal of peace from the earth is what inaugurated this time of global destruction (Rev. 6:4; 1 Thess. 5:3). Also noteworthy is Paul's comments regarding coming of this DOL. He states that for those who are sons of light and sons of day "are not in darkness that the day would overtake" them. He then comes to the conclusion that they are not destined for this wrath (1 Thess. 5:9) and are thus to encourage each other with these truths (1 Thess. 1:11).

2 Thessalonians provides another passage which helps determine the commencement of the DOL. In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul was responding to false teachers who with their teaching that the DOL had arrived had caused the Thessalonians to become alarmed and shaken from their composure. This response coupled with the prior teaching on rapture and DOL (1 Thess. 4:13–5:11) is a good argument that Paul had taught the Thessalonians a pretribulation rapture. Paul again addresses the issue of the rapture and its relationship to the DOL here. This is evident from verse 1 which states Paul's subject as "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him." This "coming" (παρουσία), is mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 where it refers to the rapture. Here, the presence of παρουσία coupled with the phrase "our gathering together to Him" also refer to the rapture event.<sup>43</sup> That this coming of Christ is the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Revelation 19 must be rejected, since then the DOL would have come without the arrival of the apostasy and the revealing of the man of lawlessness.

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<sup>43</sup> See, C. F. Hogg and W. E. Vine, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: With Notes Exegetical and Expository* (1914. Reprint, Fincastle, VA: Scripture Truth Book Company, 1959), 242; Richard L. Mayhue, *1 & 2 Thessalonians: Triumphs and Trials of a Consecrated Church* (Christian Focus, 1999), 169; Robert L. Thomas, "2 Thessalonians," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 318.

By the writing of 2 Thessalonians, Paul had no doubt taught on the rapture and the DOL both in person and by letter, specifically concerning the fact that the coming of Christ would precede the arrival of the DOL. Thus we can understand the agitation of the Thessalonians at the false teaching that declared the DOL was present. Regarding this false teaching, Paul responds that the DOL had not come and thus was not present, since two important signs had not yet occurred. In Paul's mind, the apostasy and the revealing of the man of lawlessness were the two simultaneous events that would serve to inaugurate the DOL.<sup>44</sup> The fact that they would be simultaneous events with no gap in between them is demonstrated by the fact that prior to the events one could not be in the DOL, but after them, one had to be in the DOL.

That the "apostasy" refers to the rapture must be rejected. Most commentators affirm the understanding of the "apostasy" as that of spiritual rebellion involving "a turning away from following Jehovah."<sup>45</sup> Although some have affirmed a Christian end-time apostasy, there is good reason to affirm that the apostasy is Jewish in nature and "will involve Israel, not the church. It will commence when *many* ["the many" Dan. 9:27] within the nation sign the covenant with the Antichrist (unknown to them, a covenant with death) at the beginning of that seventieth week."<sup>46</sup> This view is suggested by Wanamaker, affirmed by Rosenthal and defended well by H. A. A. Kennedy and Timothy L. Dane.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Wanamaker, 234.

<sup>45</sup> Hogg and Vine, 246.

<sup>46</sup> Rosenthal, 206.

<sup>47</sup> See Wanamaker, 244; Rosenthal, 195–207; Timothy L. Dane, "A Study of the Apostasy and the Man of Lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2:3" (Th.M. thesis, The Master's Seminary, 1996), 148; H. A. A. Kennedy, *St. Paul's Conceptions of the Last Things*, 2nd ed. (London, England: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), 218.

This apostasy is nowhere taught in the NT. So what would Paul have had in mind at the writing of 2 Thessalonians 2:3? Dane affirms that Paul was alluding to Daniel 8:23, which is a prophecy of this coming Jewish apostasy evidenced by a time when the “transgressors will have run their course.” This apostasy was what Paul had in mind in 1 Thessalonians 2:16 when he spoke of the Jews who “fill up the measure of their sin” thus referring to the time when their transgression would have run its course.<sup>48</sup> Dane affirms a link between Daniel 8:23 and 9:24 which states that the purpose of Daniel’s seventy weeks is among other things to “finish the transgression” of the Jewish people.<sup>49</sup> According to Dane, “the climax to this ongoing transgression occurs a few verses later where it says that Israel enters into a covenant with the MOL [man of lawlessness].”<sup>50</sup> Thus, the iniquity of unbelieving Israel who has continued throughout history to fill up the measure of their sin, will reach its fullness when they turn from God for the last time to join themselves to the “prince who is to come” (Dan. 9:26), the man of lawlessness.

An apostasy involving the nation of Israel uniting itself by covenant to the Antichrist rules out the position held by many that the revealing of the man of lawlessness occurs at the abomination of desolation described in Daniel 9:27 and Matt. 24:15 since the two events of 1 Thessalonians 2:3 must occur simultaneously. This is affirmed by the absence of a “then” (ἐπειτα) temporal adverb after “first” (πρῶτος) in 1 Thessalonians 2:3 which would cause the verse to be sequential and the coming of the apostasy to precede the revealing of the man of

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<sup>48</sup> Dane, 129–31.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 131–33.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 132–33.

lawlessness. Thus, “this places the rebellion and the revelation of the person of rebellion on a similar footing.”<sup>51</sup>

Instead, the revealing of the man of lawlessness must be understood to occur simultaneously when Israel signs the covenant with the Antichrist at the beginning of the seventieth week.<sup>52</sup> This event as recorded in Daniel 9:27 will clearly “reveal” (ἀποκαλύπτω) to the world the identity of the Gentile “prince who is to come” (Dan. 9:26). Ryrie notes, “he will be revealed at least to discerning people when he makes a covenant with many of the Jewish people (Dan. 9:27), and this will signal the start of the tribulation period.”<sup>53</sup> This view is not impossible and accords very well with passages like Daniel 8:23–26 which connects the rise of the Antichrist with ‘the transgressors having run their course,’ and Daniel 9:27 which affirms that this rise to power has taken place by the time of the signing of the covenant at the beginning of the seventieth week. It also fits with the rest of 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 which emphasizes the deceptive nature of the Antichrist who’s covenant will no doubt be an attractive offer of stability and security. This view also harmonizes well with 1 Thessalonians 5:3 which speaks of the DOL coming at a time that seemed to be that of peace and security, as well as with Matthew 24:5 which speaks of the antichrist(s) who will mislead many, and finally with Revelation 6:2 and the first seal which speaks of a time when the Antichrist will arise with power and authority to make covenants and provide security and peace.

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<sup>51</sup> Wanamaker, 243.

<sup>52</sup> Showers, 66.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1959), 104.

## Summary

The Scriptures affirm an unmistakable connection between God's divine wrath and the DOL. The purpose of the DOL is to judge rebellious humanity and chasten unbelieving Israel. The broad DOL commences at the beginning of the seven-year tribulation with the beginning of birth pangs (Matt. 24:5–8; Rev. 6:1–8) and continues into the beginning of the Millennium. 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 describe its inception as sudden, taking the unbelieving world by surprise during a time of supposed peace and safety, and bringing with it inescapable destruction. The DOL cannot be present until the Jewish apostasy of signing the covenant of peace and protection with the Antichrist occurs. According to Daniel 9:27 this simultaneous event will occur at the beginning of Daniel's seventieth week corresponding to the beginning of the seven-year tribulation period. Thus the broad DOL inaugurates the tribulation.

## Conclusion

Several passages of Scripture affirm an exclusive promise to the church of exemption from the coming wrath of the DOL at the end of the age during the seven-year tribulation. The exemption from this unprecedented "hour of testing" involves protection by means of removal prior to its inception. The broad DOL begins suddenly and unexpectedly and is inaugurated by the coming of the birth pangs of catastrophic destruction synonymous with those described in Matthew 24:5–8 and Revelation 6:1–8 at the beginning of the tribulation period. The start of the DOL also coincides with the Jewish apostasy and the revealing of the man of lawlessness at the signing of the covenant which begins the seven years of Daniel's seventieth week. Thus, since the church will be removed prior to the tribulation period of "testing" which coincides with the inauguration of the DOL, a pretribulation rapture must occur prior to Daniel's seventieth week and the beginning of the broad DOL.

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