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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Eschatology

“The Church and the Tribulation”

TRANSCRIPT

Our subject is the Church and the Tribulation. And for Scripture reading, I would like for you to turn with me to the third chapter of the last book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation. And we want to read together verses 7 through 13. Revelation, chapter 3, verse 7 through verse 13. This is the letter that our Lord gave through John to the church at Philadelphia. And in the seventh verse we read,

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.

I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet and to know that I have love thee.

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world that try them to dwell upon the earth.

Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast that no man take thy crown.

Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith upon the churches.”

The Church and the Tribulation. We have made or at least I hope we have made the following points in our studies recently. We have tried to show that God is silent in the sense in which he spoke during the last age during this present age. This is a time of the gathering of the church. And as the Apostle James speaks in Acts chapter 15, we are living in a time when God is visiting the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name.

The Scriptures tell us that this is the period of the long suffering of our God, in which he is not willing that any of his elect should perish but that all should have room for repentance. And so we have experienced 1800-plus years of the preaching of the gospel in order that through the preaching the Holy Spirit may gather the elect unto the Good Shepherd who gave his life for them. We also pointed out in that first of our studies that when God speaks again, he will speak again in judgment. And so it is good that he is not speaking today as he spoke during the days of the apostles and of our Lord's first coming.

The second point that we made in our series of studies was that the second coming is certain, and it is certain first for logical reasons. It is evident that if there is a

God and if he is a holy God that sin must be punished, and this will be accomplished by virtue of the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus. We looked at the biblical reasons for the second coming, the -- some of the many texts which speak of the fact that he will come again. And then we gave some theological reasons by which we might expect the second coming of the Lord Jesus, to consummate individual salvation, to consummate the salvation of Israel, to consummate the salvation of the Gentiles, and to bring about God's kingdom upon the earth or universal salvation. So the second coming of the Lord Jesus is certain.

Whenever I think of the certain coming of the Lord Jesus, I think of an incident that happened in Harry Rimmer's life. He was a Bible teacher who lived a generation or so ago. When I became a Christian, he used to travel around the country debating unbelievers on the subject of science and the Bible. And he has written a number of little books on the relationship of science and the Scriptures.

He says in one of his works that after one of his lectures a very charming young lady came up to him after his message and said, "How is it possible for a man who seems to know the Bible so well to believe in the second coming of Jesus? I would think that you would know that there is no promise of Jesus Christ coming back, not anywhere in the New Testament."

He said in great surprise, he asked, "Where in the world did you get such a fantastic idea as that? Why, the New Testament is full of promises of his return."

And with a superior smile, the young lady said, "Oh, no. Only last week, my pastor showed us there is no such promise. He read a verse in the Bible that says, 'Where is the promise of his coming?' and showed us there is none."

He said, I was oddly astounded, but I managed to gather enough breath to say, "Did your pastor read all of the context?"

And she said, "There isn't anymore to it."

And so with that, he turned to the New Testament and turned to the passage in 2 Peter, chapter 3 in which Peter says that in the last days scoffers shall come walking after their own lusts and saying, "where is the promise of his coming?"

And he said that she was so mad that she could have pulled out his hair, but she cried out, "Don't you dare call my pastor a scoffer!" [Laughter]

He said he dodged further argument and possible trouble by saying, "Honey, I didn't call your pastor a scoffer. Peter did. Blame him." [More laughter] So every time I think of a second coming, I think about the denial of the Second Advent. The truth, of course, is that the Scriptures are full of testimonies to the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

Then we turned to the calendar of future events and pointed out that we have an exciting and thrilling and moving account in Scriptures of the things that are going to happen in the future and that, according to Scripture, we shall move from apostasy through Second Advent and on into the eternal state.

In our last two studies, we have been studying the rapture and resurrection of the church. We looked first at 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4, verse 13 through verse 18 and sought to show that the church is going to experience resurrection at the second coming - - at the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

Then we looked last time at 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and spent most of our time on the change that takes place when the Lord Jesus comes in the air and the dead saints are resurrected and the living saints are changed and given a body likened to our Lord's own glorious body.

The question before us in this study is the time of the rapture. Is it the next great event of biblical prophecy? In 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 and verse 10, the Apostle Paul writes to the Thessalonians and says to them that through the Lord Jesus they have had an experience of conversion. They are now serving the living God and waiting for his son from heaven who delivered us from the wrath to come. Is it really true that when the

Scriptures say we have been converted in order to wait for the coming of our Lord from heaven, that this is the next event on the prophetic program?

In Titus chapter 2, verse 13, the Apostle Paul writing to young Titus says that we should be looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and savior Jesus Christ. Are we really looking for the second coming of the Lord Jesus as the next event, or is this simply a kind of expectancy for a particular event of a number of events of the future? In other words, is this Second Advent or second coming of the Lord Jesus an imminent event? Jude, and the epistle that he writes in the 21st verse, also speaks of looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus unto eternal life.

Now, we can cite a number of other texts of Scripture. No doubt many of you know some, too, in which we are exhorted in the New Testament to look or to wait for the coming of the Lord Jesus. Do these passages suggest to us that the next great event on the prophetic program is that rapture and resurrection of the church?

Now, the question of issue, theologically, is does the rapture of the church in which the saints meet the Lord in the air, does it occur at the beginning of the tribulation period? In that case, we would have a pre -- a pretribulation rapture, the rapture would occur before the tribulation. Or do we have a midtribulation rapture? The saints being caught up to meet the Lord in the air in the middle of the tribulation period, which, as you know, is divided into three-and-a-half year periods of time. We will talk about this next week when we launch into a discussion of the tribulation. Or is our Lord coming at the end of the tribulation period? In which case, we could call this particular interpretation a posttribulation rapture view.

So the question is: Is the Lord coming at the beginning of the tribulation, pretribulationism? Is he coming in the middle tribulation period, midtribulationism? Or is he coming at the end of the tribulation period before the millennial kingdom, in which case we would have posttribulationism? That's the question that we want to try to discuss for a little while.

First of all, we want to look at the premillennial order of events. And what I want to do here is not simply to review what we have already gone over, but I want to show the basis upon which these statements, these propositions are based. The first proposition is, the Messianic kingdom or the millennial kingdom is future.

Now, of course, if you read the Bible, I have a hunch that any of you reading the Bible would not have any question about this at all. If you just simply read it for yourself, you would gain the impression that the Messianic kingdom is a future kingdom. But for a few moments I want to try to show it from Scripture. So will you turn with me, first of all, to Matthew chapter 24. Matthew chapter 24. Let me read a few verses. I don't want to have to argue this in great detail; otherwise we will not finish our study. But if you have any questions about the passages, I suggest you write down the texts and look them up and ponder them when you get home tonight. Matthew chapter 24 verse 29 through verse 31.

Now, notice this is said in the context of the Olivet discourse that our Lord gave near the end of his earthly ministry, and he is describing some things that answer questions that were asked him at the beginning of this discourse, such as, Where is the promise of your coming? But that's not the precise thing. It's, Tell us when these things shall be and what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the age.

Now, this is answered right here, "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give its light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heaven shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

I want you to notice from this passage that what we have here is a prom -- is a prophecy of the coming of our Lord Jesus in great power and glory at his Second Advent.

Now, nothing is said about the kingdom here. And my proposition is, the Messianic kingdom is future.

So will you turn over to chapter 25, the next of the chapters and let me read verse 31 through verse 34. And I think when you look at these passages together; you will see that the Second Advent in power and glory precedes the kingdom. Notice, he says, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory." In other words, this is the same event referred to in chapter 24, his coming and power and glory. "And before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from the other, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left. Then shall the King"--now, notice the King is speaking--"Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Now, I don't want to, as I say, get too involved in these discussions of the text, but you will notice that he has prophesied that there is to be a Second Advent in power and glory, that that Second Advent is going to be followed by a judgment of the nations, and that following the judgment of the nations, certain of those who pass the test of the king will enter into the kingdom. So our proposition that the kingdom is future is, I think, substantiated by these texts. Our Lord, of course, looking into the future and speaking in the future throughout all of this discourse.

The second proposition is that the Second Advent is premillennial. The Second Advent is premillennial; now I think this follows from these texts that we have just read. If it is true that the Lord Jesus comes to the earth in great power and great glory, judges the nations, and then the kingdom follows, it's obvious that his Second Advent, the term that we use to refer to his coming to the earth, is a premillennial advent. It occurs before the millennium.

C, or the third proposition: the tribulation is future. The tribulation is future. I think all of us, again, would know this if we just thought for a moment about the nature of the tribulation which is greater than any other testing that has ever had to pass upon the earth and is described in such awful terms that no incident in human history in the past could possibly have been the tribulation. But it is specifically said in verse 29 of -- rather verse 24 through 15 -- from 15 through 31 to be a future thing. The tribulation is future.

Now, I want to read a few verses beginning with verse 15. The Lord Jesus is speaking, and he is looking again toward the future answering the questions that they ask about his coming. He says in verse 15, "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whosoever readeth, let him understand) Then let them who are in Judea flee into the mountains: Let him who is on the housetop not come down to take any thing outside of his house. Neither let him who is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto those who are with child, and to those who nurse children in those days. But pray that your flight be not in winter, neither on the Sabbath day. For then" -- The Lord speaking with reference to the future -- "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor shall ever be. And except those days should be shortened, there should be no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."

I want you to notice the extreme severity of the tribulation. Because this indicates for us that no kind of earthy tribulation up to this point could possibly be compared with this tribulation of the future. And no tribulation of the past could be said to have fulfilled these prophecies concerning the future tribulation.

But notice specifically verse 29 when he says, immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, the moon shall not give its light, the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heaven shall be shaken.

So if the tribulation had occurred at the present time, then we should have had these events occur. We know that these events have not occurred, and they'd occur immediately after the tribulation. In the light of all of this, I think we can conclude with reasonable certainty very simply that the tribulation is a future experience for the earth.

The fourth proposition is that the tribulation is premillennial and preadventist. Now, that follows, of course, from what we have been saying. “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened,” and verse 30, “and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” So, again, in this context, we are told that the tribulation is premillennial, it occurs before the advent of the Lord Jesus to the earth.

The fifth proposition is the rapture is premillennial. In other words, what we have tried to show is the Messianic kingdom is future. The Second Advent is premillennial. It occurs before the kingdom. The tribulation is future, and it is premillennial, occurring before the Second Advent.

Now, we want to show that the rapture itself is premillennial. I want you to turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse -- 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and verse 50 and following. I just added 35 chapters to the Book of 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 50.

Now, this is the passage in which we have, remember, the description of the change that takes place in the bodies of the saints at the rapture of the church. And it is prefaced by the statement in verse 50, "Now, this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Then he proceeds to tell us about the change that must take place when the Lord Jesus comes in the air in the bodies of those who are living.

The implication I think is strong enough to say that we have a proof here that the kingdom is to follow the rapture. For he says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the

kingdom. There must be a change. He describes the change. We reasonably infer from this that the change precedes the kingdom necessary for participation in the kingdom, so far as living saints are concerned, so that we can conclude that the rapture is premillennial. There are other ways in which this might be proved. We do not have time to talk about them.

Well, that brings us now to the debated views of the time of the rapture. We have shown it's premillennial. But we have not shown whether it is pre -- whether the rapture of the church is pretribulational, midtribulational, or posttribulational. We have only shown that it is premillennial.

So I want to discuss for a moment or two the debated views of the time of the rapture of the church. There are three competing views, and these three are the posttribulational view, the midtribulational view, and the pretribulational view. Remember the outline.

The first view, the posttribulational view, is the view that the rapture of the church is not the next event on the prophetic program. The next event on the prophetic program are -- or is the prelude to the tribulation itself. The next major event on the prophetic program is the tribulation period, so that we do not look for the rapture of the church if we hold to the posttribulational rapture view, but we look for the signs of the beginning of the tribulation, and we look specifically for the tribulation period. Once the tribulation period begins, then we know that we are about seven years distant from the rapture of the church. So the posttribulational view holds that the Lord Jesus will come for the church. The church will be raptured at the conclusion of the tribulation period.

Speaking very broadly, this view rests upon these points. First of all, the proponents of this view claim that the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture is a doctrine that the church knew nothing about until around 1820, and so the proponents of this view plead the novelty of the pretribulational view should cause us to reject it. But the church

has historically believed that the coming of the Lord followed the tribulation rather than preceded it.

Now, this is an argument to which we should pay some attention. Because if you can show that the church has believed in a posttribulational rapture down through the centuries, then that should have some weight with us because, after all, we are told by the Lord Jesus in the Upper Room discourse that it is the office of the Holy Spirit to teach down through the centuries. And if this is what he has taught the church, and if there is a consensus concerning it, for 18- or 1900 years, we should have to listen to it. That means, of course, that when anyone comes up with some unique or strange or novel doctrine, we should look at it very suspiciously, if it is contrary to the general thought of the church down through the years.

For example, the charismatic teaching of the 20th century is a novelty. We do not find any of this kind of teaching for 1800 years before the time of 1906 when the modern charismatic movement began. For 1800 years we know nothing about professing Christians speaking in gibberish. It's just not known. Therefore we should look with a great deal of suspicion upon the charismatic movement.

Incidentally last week, I heard a story that really I laugh about it. I have been laughing about it for about four days, and I just have to tell it to you. [Laughter] When I was at the conference in central Texas last weekend, one of the men who is associated with the National Guard or with Fort Hood or Camp Hood, Fort Hood or whatever they call it at Killeen, told me of an incident that happened with his roommate in Atlanta, Georgia. This roommate of his went to a charismatic meeting in which they were speaking in tongues and prophesying. And he came home and told this man this story of happened there, and he relayed it to me. So this is secondhand, but, nevertheless, he claims it was true. And I like the story. I'm inclined to think it's true, because I like it. [Laughter]

Anyway in the meeting in the charismatic meeting when the time came for the prophecies to be made, a woman stood up in the meeting, and they were speaking in tongues, the prophecies. And so she said [Johnson makes a noise with his tongue and lips suggesting gibberish]. That is not done very well, I understand that. [Laughter] I'm not too -- I'm not too adept at this. But anyway, she prophesied, and then she sat down. And then a man got up in the meeting and he said [Johnson utters the same gibberish, followed by laughter] like this, and then he sat down.

Well, they knew they had an interpreter, so they allowed these prophecies. And so the interpreter got up and he said that he would like to interpret those prophecies that were made. And the interpretation of the first prophecy made by the woman was that Jesus is Lord. Now, I don't know why anyone needs to prophesy that. It's stated in Scripture hundreds of times and communicates no new knowledge at all, but anyway she prophesied that Jesus is Lord.

And then he said, now the man got up he prophesied that the women should keep silence in the churches. [Loud laughter] And then the interpreter added, “Receive ye the first prophecy and ignore ye the second.” [Johnson, audience laugh at length]. I must say, I really have enjoyed that [more laughter]. If you see me walking around smiling, the chances are the next couple of weeks it will be upon reflection of the great insight of that interpreter in giving those interpretations.

Coming back to the point. The point is simply this: That if a teaching is a novelty, we should be suspicious of it. And so I think we should be somewhat suspicious of a teaching that is a novelty.

Now, in the case of the pretribulational rapture of the church, if you can show that the church believed in a posttribulational rapture, and we teach a pretribulational rapture, we should be suspicious of that teaching.

Now, the facts are, in spite of what our posttribulational friends say, that there is no teaching so far as I can tell in the early church of a posttribulational rapture nor is

there any teaching of a pretribulational rapture. The facts are, it seems to me from reading the early church literature, that they did not have any doctrine that distinguished a rapture from a second coming. In other words, they did not speak to this issue at all.

It is true that in the 1800s, in the early 1800s, the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture became popular and was spread far and wide largely by J.N. Darby and the Brethren movement. It has found its way into the Scofield Bible. And we, of course, read in our Scofield Bibles about the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture of the church. And it is taught, for example, at many of our seminaries, most of our Bible colleges around the country, most of our Bible institutes. It is taught as a part of the doctrinal statement of the Dallas Theological Seminary.

This is the first claim of those who hold to a posttribulational view that the pretribulational view is a new view. One of the interesting things about this claim made by a recent friend of mine who has written a book called, *The Church and Tribulation*, Professor Robert Gundry. Professor Gundry particularly labors this point that the pretribulational rapture is a relatively recent thing and should be located in the 1820s, but his book is characterized by the most unique presentation of posttribulationalism that has ever been written. And so he himself has many, many unique doctrines in his particular book. And he has jumped upon the pretribulationalists for being unique in their teaching. I must say a word about it to him when I next see him.

A second argument that is used by the posttribulationalists is 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4, verse 13 through chapter 5, verse 11, is really a support for their view. Because they say since 4:13 through 18 is followed by 5:1 through 11, and both of these passages speak of the coming of our Lord, one speaking of the rapture and the other of the Advent, and since they say there is no distinct change of subject between the two sections, then we must consider chapter 4 and the rapture to be a reference to the Advent of our Lord to the church.

Now, in that passage, I can only have time to point out that the passage begins with a suggestion of a change of subject. For we read in chapter 5, verse 1, but of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. And while it is true that the times and seasons is a term that refers to the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus, the expression that is used in chapter 5, verse 1, is the same expression that is used back in verse 9 of chapter 4, and verse 13 of chapter 4. And in each of those cases, there is a change of subject in the course of the argument of 1 Thessalonians. And so I do not think it is proper to say that there is no change of subject. I do believe that in the fourth chapter, the apostle speaks of the rapture and in the fifth chapter, he moves on to speak about the times and the seasons of the Advent, because that is the next event of significance after the rapture takes place.

The second -- the third and final support for posttribulationalism that is popularly taught is expressed in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2. In 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2 in verses 1 and 2, we read, “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and by our gathering together unto him.” So a reference is made here in the first verse to the coming of our Lord Jesus and our gathering together unto him, which would seem to refer to the rapture of the church. But then in the eighth verse we read, “And then shall that Wicked one be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.” And there it seems to be a reference to the Advent. And so in verse one if the same advent is referred to, then we must put the rapture of the church at the time of the Second Advent. And that is a very formidable argument, and we should pay a great deal of attention to it.

I only want you to notice this, however, that this incident, as -- that has -- the things that have happened in the Thessalonian church, if we are to believe what Paul says here about their -- their problems, the things that have happened in that church argue just as easily for a pretribulational rapture, for he says, Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and by our gathering together unto him that ye be not

soon shaken in mind or be troubled neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of the Lord is present.

Now, you can see that if the Thessalonian church had been taught that the Day of the Lord is the day that precedes the coming of our Lord Jesus to the earth and that the rapture soon follows the beginning of the day of the Lord, why would they be troubled in mind? They would be rejoicing. They would be very happy. Because on the doctrine of the posttribulationists, we are looking for the tribulation, we are looking for the day of the Lord. So when the day of the Lord comes, then, of course, the rapture of the church is imminent. So they would not be troubled. They would not be shaken in mind. They wouldn't be disturbed in spirit. They would be rejoicing because the day of the Lord is present.

Now, if I were a posttribulationist and someone were to say to me, it's evident in the light of world affairs that the tribulation has begun, and if I were convinced of that, I wouldn't feel bad. I would rejoice because I would know the Lord was coming within a seven-year period of time, and even a man as old as I might make the second coming of the Lord Jesus. So that would be a thing to stir me up to rejoice rather than to be disturbed about it.

But, if the apostles had told me that the rapture of the church precedes the day of the Lord and precedes the time of judgment upon the earth, and then someone were to tell me, we are in the day of the Lord, then I would be disturbed it, then I would be shaken in mind, because I might conclude that I had missed the rapture of the church. So you see this argument works both ways. We, I hope in time, will have a chance to deal with both of these, but this is a very difficult subject, and I only want to try to deal in our studies with the general trend of the discussion.

The midtribulation view is the view that the Lord Jesus is going to come in the air in the midst of the tribulation period of seven years. This is really a pretribulation view in the sense that most people who believe the Lord is coming at the three-and-a-

half-year mark during the seven-year period of the tribulation believe that you should only call the last three and a half years of the seven-year period the tribulation. And so they really say, we really believe in a pretribulational doctrine, too, we just call the last half of that seven-year period the tribulation.

But it is by those who call the whole seven-year period a tribulation, a midtribulational view. It is based upon a passage such as Revelation Chapter 11 verses 15 through 19 in which reference is made to the seventh trumpet of the judgments of the Book of Revelation. And since the apostles stated in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 that the Lord Jesus was going to come at the last trump, and since we are in the Book of Revelation given a description of seven great trumpet judgments which are to be poured out upon the earth, what more natural than to expect the Lord to come at the time of the seventh of the trumpets of the Book of Revelation, which they place in the mid of the tribulation period?

Now, that, of course, isn't really I think true to the Book of Revelation, but this overlooks the fact that we may have, and I think do have, two different series of trumpets in these two passages. In Revelation, we are distinctly told about seven trumpet judgments poured out upon the earth during the tribulation period. The statement in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 about the last trump says nothing whatsoever about any series of trumpets before that time. And there is no reason, and many commentators agree, there is no reason to equate the two trumpet series.

Let's leave that alone and go on to the pretribulational view because very few people today hold the midtribulational view. There are many arguments, some with not a great deal with cogency advanced in favor of the pretribulational view. I know of many who've advanced ten, fifteen, twenty, some have even advanced fifty arguments for the pretribulational rapture, but not all of the arguments are very convincing. And I want to concentrate on three of them that I think do have some significance. So let's move now to III, a brief defense of the pretribulational rapture.

This -- this view, of course, involves a two-phase coming program. In other words, if we believe in a pretribulational rapture, then we must believe that the Lord Jesus is going to come before the tribulation, the saints are going to be caught up to meet him in the air, the dead saints, their bodies resurrected, the living saints, their bodies changed. They shall meet the Lord in the air before the tribulation period begins. Let's call that the second coming, or the rapture.

Then at the conclusion of the seven-year period after the judgments of the tribulation are poured out during that seven-year period, the Lord Jesus is going to come to the earth to establish his kingdom. Let's call that coming the Second Advent, so that we will distinguish the Second Advent to the earth from the rapture, or the second coming, in the air.

Now, you can see that if you believe in a pretribulational rapture of the church, then you have a two-phase advent program. In the air, before the tribulation, to the earth at the conclusion of the seven-year period of time. So the coming of our Lord Jesus, speaking broadly, the advent has two phases, coming or rapture, and then seven years later, advent to the earth. Now, I hope we have that in our minds plainly.

This may seem to pose some problems with Scripture because, after all, this is not specifically spelled out in any particular text of Scripture. We do not find any statement, for example, in the word of God that says there are two phases to the Second Advent program. There is phase number one in which the Lord comes for the saints in the air. There is phase two in which after the tribulation period he comes to the earth to establish his kingdom. That's not stated in so many words in Scripture. What we are doing is inferring and reasoning from the statements of Scripture, which are given to us as divine revelation.

Let us also point out there is no statement in Scripture that says that he's going to come after the tribulation period and the saints are going to be caught up to meet him in the air, and then he's going to come to the earth with all the saints to establish his

kingdom. That is not stated either. Nor is it stated anywhere in Scripture that he's going to come in the air in the middle of the tribulation period and after a three-and-a-half-year period of time come to the earth to establish his kingdom. Not any of these are specifically stated in precise words in Scriptures. We are inferring. We are reasoning with the revealed truth that we have seeking to harmonize and present the truth as a coherent doctrine of the second coming or Second Advent of the Lord Jesus. So we should not raise objections such as, that's never stated in Scripture, because that kind of objection does not really hold.

Now, let's think in order for you to see how this may be so. Let's think of the first coming of the Lord Jesus. There is no statement in the Old Testament Scriptures that the coming of the Lord was to be a two-phase program. Nowhere in the Old Testament do we read the Lord is going to come twice. It doesn't say that anywhere. In fact, the Old Testament prophecies are prophecies in which the first coming and the second coming are mingled together.

As you know, in the case of one outstanding passage, Isaiah Chapter 61 verse 1 and following, the first and the second coming are found in the same verses right next to each other and, in fact, in the same verse. In Isaiah 61 verse one we read, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

The Lord Jesus cited this text in the synagogue in Nazareth and said, This day this Scripture is fulfilled in your ears, but he stopped in the middle of a verse. And he did not repeat the rest of the verse, “and the day of vengeance of our God to comfort all that mourn.” Now, the reason he stopped in the middle of the verse was because the first part of this has to do with the first advent. And the second part of it has to do with the Second Advent. Those prophecies mingled the first and Second Advent so that the idea

of a two-phase advent program was something that the Old Testament did not, while it contained it, did not make clear. We only discovered this in the actual historical development of the ministry of the Lord Jesus.

And we saw, as we looked back now, that he fulfilled a number of the passages of the Old Testament but left a great number to be fulfilled. Taught the apostles, of course, concerning the kingdom that he would come again. And we discover now that the Old Testament prophecies, which looked forward to the coming of the Lord actually are prophecies that have a two-phase program of the Lord. So when we look now into the future from our vantage point we should remember that there are texts in the Apostolic writings and in the Apocalypse in which we may have mingled the phase of our Lord's advent program that has to do with the rapture and the phase that has to do with the advent of the earth side by side.

So -- and I think also that should give us a healthy humility when we interpret prophecy. It just may not turn out to be exactly like you have been taught, and like you yourself have thought you have seen in holy Scripture, so don't be surprised.

There are several important arguments I want to briefly mentioned -- mention two or three of them. I'm not mentioning theological arguments, historical arguments, or any types of arguments of that sort, but specifically some from Scripture. Will you turn with me first to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 9? I wish that we had time to talk in detail about this, but we just do not have the time in our series of studies. 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 9. The apostle writes to the Thessalonians, "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ."

A tribulation is called, in Scripture, "the great day of his wrath." In Revelation chapter 6 in verse 17. And here we are said to be not appointed unto wrath but delivered from it, in the first chapter in the tenth verse, where the Lord -- where the Lord -- where the apostle says the Thessalonians have been converted to wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivered us from the wrath to come. So

the statement is made here in the fifth chapter that we are not appointed to wrath. In the first chapter, it is said that he is the deliverer of us from the wrath to come.

And if there should be any question about this being a reference to the whole period of time in the second verse of this fifth chapter, he says, “For yourselves know perfectly for the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.” He's talking about the beginning of the day of the Lord and of the wrath that accompanies it. So we can conclude from this, that this text, the ninth verse of the fifth chapter, is a pretty fair promise that the church is not appointed for wrath or for the tribulation, but that the rapture shall precede the tribulation.

The second argument is the argument from the structure of the Apocalypse. And I want to remind you of a few things, which I'm sure you know, because you've read the Book of Revelation a number of times. Have you ever thought about the occurrence of the word "church" in the Book of Revelation as you have read it? If you haven't, I suggest you go home, you begin with Revelation chapter 1. It'll take you about 15 minutes to read through the Book of Revelation, and that you read through it looking for one word, the word "church".

Now, what you will discover, of course, that in the first chapter you have mention of the word "church". In the second chapter, you have some mentions of the word "church". In the third chapter, you have some mentions of the word "church". Then beginning at the fourth chapter, in which there begins to be unfolded the wrath of the tribulation period, you find no mention of the church until the 22nd chapter of the book when after the revelation is over, John is told to take the revelation and send it to the churches. So in other words, the word "church" disappears from the Book of Revelation and is never found in the section in which John describes the wrath of the tribulation period. That is a most amazing thing. Nevertheless, it is true from chapter 4 through chapter 21, no reference whatsoever to the term "church".

Now, my good friend Robert Gundry who has written the book, *The Church and the Tribulation*, an excellent defense his unique posttribulational view, says that it's true that the word "church" is not mentioned in that section, but the word "church" is not mentioned when the scenes discuss things in heaven either. And so he concludes that since the word "church" is not mentioned about the church in heaven, we are not justified in arguing, since it is not mentioned of the saints who are on the earth during the tribulation period, we are not justified in arguing that that has -- is a point for a pretrib rapture, but I like to suggest to my good professorial friend that the Revelation concerns primarily events upon the earth and not events in heaven.

And while the point that he makes is true, this book is not a presentation of things in heaven, but the book is a presentation of the judgments of God that are poured out upon the earth primarily. And since they are the things that are poured out upon the earth primarily, we should expect to find the word "church" if the church is on the earth, particularly in view of the fact that in the first three chapters, when had the church is on the earth, the word "church" is mentioned over and over again in chapters 1, 2, and 3.

So I think then that the argument from the structure of the Book of Revelation is very suggestive of the fact that the church is raptured before the tribulation period and that is why the word "church" never appears in the scenes that describe the judgments that are poured out upon the earth.

Now, you know of course also the characteristic expression after the letters to the churches is, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.” Now, let's just take a look, for example, at chapter 2, verse 7. Now, this is the first of our Lord's letters to the churches, and he says in the seventh verse, after he has given the message to the church at Ephesus, He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. And then there follows six other letters, remember, in chapters 2 and 3 in which the Lord Jesus addresses the various churches of Asia Minor, and then at the conclusion of each one of these letters he says, let – he that hath – my memory is failing

me – He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. So seven times he mentions, He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

Will you look now at chapter 13 in verse 9? In the midst of the section that has to do with the tribulation period, suddenly the Apostle John, giving the revelation that came from the Lord Jesus says, Revelation 13:9, “if any man have an ear, let him hear,” period.

In other words, there is no reference here to, He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. But, if any man has an ear, let him hear. The implication again, it's only an implication, is that the church is not here upon the earth during this period of time described here.

Finally, one last argument, we don't have time to develop it, is found in Revelation chapter 3 in verse 10, which I still consider to be a promise of deliverance from the tribulation period. It is a promise addressed to the church at Philadelphia. And the promise is, "Because thou hast kept of the word of my patience, I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all of the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." That text is, I think, a very good text saying specifically that the church is going to be delivered from the tribulation period.

Now, since our time is up, I want to conclude with just a comment concerning the significance of the rapture, and then at the conclusion of our hour next time, I want to say a further word about chapter 3, verse 10. The doctrine of the rapture of the church is an important doctrine for us. I say doctrine that suggests for us faithfulness in service. It should be a motive and incentive to give ourselves to devotion to the Lord Jesus. It should also have tremendous motivation in evangelistic activity. I refer to our own personal testimony. It also should be a comforting doctrine. If we were looking for the tribulation, surely we would have to say it is not as comforting a doctrine as the doctrine that the Lord Jesus may come again at any moment.

There is an old story about a man who visited the Villa Ara Connate in Italy. He saw the gardener. The grounds were kept in beautiful shape, speaking to the gardener he said, "When does the owner of this villa come here?"

He said, "Well, I've been working here for 20 years, and he's only been here four times."

"When was the last time that he was here?"

"12 years ago."

"Who takes charge? To whom do you report?"

He said, "I report to a steward in Milan."

"Why, you keep these gardens as if you were expecting the owner tomorrow."

And the gardener replied, "Today, sir. Today."

That really is the kind of attitude provoked by the doctrine of the rapture of the church as the next significant prophetic event. I think that on balance the Scriptures teach that the Lord Jesus to come again for the church imminently, and that we have reason from Scripture to look for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and savior Jesus Christ.

We will continue our studies next Wednesday. Let's close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the word of God. And we do ask that the hope of the second coming of our Lord Jesus and the rapture of the church may be such a bright hope that it may affect our daily life. We ask, O, God, that we may see our activities in the light of his soon return and that, above all, we may look at our Christian service in the light of the fact that at any moment we might be called into his presence. Go with us as we leave.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

