IMMINENCY
The Phantom Doctrine

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1: The Problem

Therefore, when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand) for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall… And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short (Matthew 24:15, 21-22).

Will we, the church, face a very real persecution at the hands of a very real Antichrist before we are translated into the presence of God at Christ's second coming? If not, to whom does Christ refer when speaking of the "elect of God"? If this passage were understood at face value, it would seem that He is referring to the church going into the last days. But there are many that disagree with this conclusion, those who cannot accept the possibility of extreme hardship just before the Rapture of the church. The "imminent (any moment) return of Christ" is their only possible solution to keep the church away from this terrible time of persecution. For want of a better term, I have chosen to call this theory of an "any moment" return of Christ, a *phantom doctrine*. As we continue, we will see that there is good reason to label this belief a "phantom". It will be your responsibility to weigh their doctrine of imminency against the teaching of Scripture.

The dictionary defines *phantom* as "something apparently seen, heard, or sensed, but having no physical reality… having substance only in the mind." Yet, as we will demonstrate by the passages of Scripture they use to prove their theory, pretribulationists (those who want to keep the church out of the persecution associated with Antichrist) see evidence *in that which is absent in the text*, to keep the church out of this terrible time. They employ a phantom reality to accomplish the very thing that is not taught in the Word of God. We shall see that there is not one explicit passage in the entire Bible that states that Christ will come and rapture the church away at "any moment". Not one! Every passage used to argue for an any moment rapture is used because of what it does not say, not for what it does say, perfectly fitting the definition of a phantom doctrine.

No one enters a formal debate for the purpose of losing. The goal is to win. The key to winning demands that one side or the other must have an edge (an argument or some evidence) that will so move the audience that, if the contest is close, this edge will sway the audience in their favor. As mentioned earlier, it is no understatement to say that imminency is the "emotional" edge that the pretribulationists use. The idea that Christ could return at any moment, snatching away the church to heaven and thereby sidestepping Antichrist's persecution is naturally preferred by every true believer. But pretribulationalists vigorously

defend their desire to escape this persecution using the phantom doctrine of imminency. Who, in their right mind, wants to go through the worst persecution known to the elect of God before Christ's return (Matt. 24:21-22, 29-31)? Given the choice, no one would vote to be persecuted by such extreme measures as described by Christ to His disciples on the Mount of Olives.

But let us continue. To hold to the imminent return of Christ, pretribulationists must teach that there are no prophetic predictions that *must* be fulfilled before Christ returns to rapture the church. Pretribulationists go so far as to insist that no prophetic event has needed to be fulfilled since the day of Pentecost, fifty days after the Lord's resurrection. This, by definition, would place the persecution of Antichrist after the Rapture as Christ taught that there would be very specific things that had to occur before Antichrist takes his seat in the temple and demands the worship of the world.

Thus, the Olivet Discourse must be applicable to someone other than the church. After all, their argument continues, 1 Thessalonians 5:9 promises the church that she is not destined to undergo the wrath of God, and since pretribulationalists believe the persecution of Antichrist is the wrath of God, the church must be gone before that persecution begins. The "any moment" rapture doctrine, on the surface, seems to accomplish all of these things quite nicely.

And yet, Christ clearly teaches that this final time of persecution will be against the "elect." Matthew 24:22, 24, and 31 demand that the phrase "the elect" refers to none other than the church. No other entity meets the requirements placed on this unique group as presented in Matthew 24:22 and 24.[1] Is there a contradiction between the teachings of Christ and Paul? The choices are that either Paul was wrong about the believer not being destined for God's wrath or Christ was wrong when He explained that Antichrist's vengeance is against the "elect." Think about that for a moment. The answer is obvious. Christ and Paul are both correct. The apparent contradiction is created by the pretribulationalist's insistence that the persecution of Antichrist is the same as the wrath of God. This conclusion then necessitates the phantom doctrine of imminency. Only in this manner can the pretrib rapturist keep the church out of this terrible time of persecution.

On the other hand, all other views on the timing of the Rapture require the Rapture to follow a certain number of signs, opposing the phantom doctrine of imminency. To express the nature of the signs, the Lord used the metaphor of a pregnant woman about to give birth. The Olivet Discourse recorded by Matthew includes three clearly defined stages. The first stage is beginning birth pangs, which includes deceptions, wars, famines and earthquakes. The second stage consists of hard-labor which Scripture depicts as the wrath of Satan—not of God ("the devil

has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time" (Revelation 12:11 emphasis added; cf. 13:2; 2 Thess. 2:9)). This stage is composed of tribulation, death, hatred, and a great falling away.

The final stage is deliverance: the gathering of God's elect at His coming, ending the wrath of Satan and initiating God's wrath against those who remain. Does Scripture teach that Christ's coming is imminent, that Jesus Christ can return at any moment to snatch the church away to heaven, or does it not? The progressive stages, each one becoming progressively worse, is the sequence of events that Christ gives His disciples (who would soon become the founding fathers of the church) in response to their question, "What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age" (Matt. 24:3). If you are a part of the elect of God who Christ refers to in His response to His disciples, then the theory of imminency is impossible and cannot be supported by Scripture, plain and simple.

As was mentioned earlier, conspicuously absent from any defense of imminency is an explicit reference in Scripture. This phantom doctrine is deduced from several passages in the New Testament, which we will look at carefully. As we shall see, a closer examination of each passage will show that the New Testament writers were not emphasizing any moment Rapture, but the certainty of the future revelation of Jesus Christ — our blessed hope. Now let us see what these "imminency passages" really do say and you be the judge. Your future well-being may depend upon it!

[1] The days of persecution are cut short for the "elect." "The elect" are not deceived by the signs and wonders of the false Christs and false prophets during the persecution by Satan/Antichrist. "The elect" are waiting for the beginning of Christ's *Parousia*, which begins with their being gathered together by the angels. "The elect" are gathered together before the wrath of God comes during the Day of the Lord (Matt. 24:29).

2: The Scriptures

James 5:7-9

"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for *the coming of the Lord is near*. Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, *the Judge is standing right at the door*." [1]

In my opinion, if one looks only to the English translation of these verses in James, this is the best passage the pretribulationist can use to try to prove imminency. Therefore, it's a great passage with which to begin our study. The key phrase in this passage says that *the coming of the Lord is near*, using the *perfect tense verb eggiken* (to come near). In Greek, the perfect tense speaks of a *completed, past action* that has existing results. This is just the opposite of what the imminent return of Christ demands, an "any moment" *future* rapture of the church. The "coming near" that James refers to, is a coming near already accomplished. This had occurred *before* James wrote the letter and has direct implications even until this very day. The reader of the book of James needs to live in light of this past, accomplished fact. It can have no other meaning here! James did not know the day and hour of the Lord's *parousia*.

This is the very thought that James is attempting to get across in verse 9! As before, the pretribbers will tell you that James' use of the phrase *the Judge is standing right at the door* supports the imminent return of Christ, as suggested in the preceding verse! But the verb "*is standing*" is also in the perfect tense. No emphasis is placed on what may happen in the future, rather the emphasis is on the results of something that has already happened in the past. Interestingly, in the Olivet Discourse, Jesus uses *eggus* and the concept of *standing at the door*. The easiest conclusion to draw is that James is using information taken directly from the Lord's teaching. Jesus states, "So, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near [*eggus*], right at the door" (Matt. 24:33).

[1] Italics have been added to certain verse references in this chapter to highlight particular words or phrases relevant to our discussion.

But look at another argument that is based upon comparing Scripture with Scripture. If imminency is taught by James, then the Kingdom of God must be imminent as well. Jesus, in reference to the Kingdom of God, uses the exact same Greek word (*eggiken*). The Lord stated in Mark 1:15, "…The time is fulfilled, and *the kingdom of God is at hand*; repent and believe in the gospel" (italics added). James states, "The coming of the Lord has drawn near." Because both passages use Greek verbs that are in the perfect tense, if the first speaks of imminency, then the other must likewise be imminent. Equally, if one is not imminent, neither is the other. This is the only valid conclusion that one can draw.

The fact of the matter is that the Kingdom of God *cannot* be imminent until several significant prophetic events have taken place, events that will initiate the physical, earthly reign of Christ on earth. The first six trumpet judgments must occur, the salvation of Israel must take place, and God's reclaiming His rightful rule on earth must be included in these activities (see Rev. 11:15-18).

To sum up our brief overview, it must be remembered that this all-important Greek verb translated "*is near*," is in the perfect tense. It refers to something already finished, not to something — like the Rapture — that (according to pretribulationalists) can occur at any moment in the future. The Rapture of the church will only be imminent once the sign of the Day of the Lord is given in the sun, moon, and stars (Mat. 24:29-30, Rev. 6:12-17).

Revelation 3:11

"I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown."

The Greek word translated *quickly* is *tachu*. Although often thought of as a Greek adjective, it occurs most often as an adverb, especially in the book of Revelation. It is used five times in Revelation to describe the coming of the Lord (Rev. 2:16; 3:11; 22:7, 12 and 20). In all five of these verses, *tachu* modifies the verb *come*. When an adverb modifies a verb, it can answer the question *where, when, how, why*, and *under what circumstances* the action of the verb occurs. The context determines which answer is in view. Concerning the coming of Christ, the debate centers around the question of whether the use of *tachu* here is in reference to *when* or *how*. Imminency demands that Christ, in his revelation to John, is answering the question of *when* rather than *how*. However, such a conclusion has two problems, one logical and the other biblical.

The logical problem is an historical one. Having history on our side, when making this adverb emphasize *when*, the word *quickly* loses its impact when we realize that it has been over 1900 years since Christ instructed John to use that word. However,

to have this adverb emphasize *how* Christ will come, *quickly*, is not depreciated by the fact that Christ's return is still a future event, even though it's been almost 2000 years.

The biblical problem making this particular adverb refer to the imminent return of Christ is the fact that Jesus, by His own admission, did not know the day or the hour of His return. As Christ is the author of the book of Revelation, it seems contradictory to believe He was referring to *when* he would come rather than *how* He would come.

Now here is another good illustration of the preciseness of the Greek language. The verb *know*, as used by Christ when He explained to His disciples "of that day and hour no one knows" (Matt. 24:36), is also in the perfect tense. Remember what you read earlier about the perfect tense. It emphasizes the results of a past action. What Christ was saying is that the only person who knew, in the past, when Christ would return, is God the Father. Unlike *eggus*, which tells us *where* the Lord is, *tachu* tells us *how* the Lord will come, bringing harmony to both passages when Scripture is compared with Scripture.

Mark 13:35-37

"Therefore, be on the alert — for *you* do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning — *in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep*. What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'"

Of the many passages *often* used to argue for the doctrine of imminency, this one is really bad. A number of years ago I received a letter from an elderly gentleman who steadfastly argued against the prewrath position, using this passage as his proof text for imminency. He went on to tell me that he spoke with authority because he had taught prophecy for 55 years, and he even had a newsletter that went out three or four times a year! That's a long time to miss the obvious error in his thinking! First of all, this particular passage is part of the Olivet Discourse that pretribulationists will tell you, refers to Israel (not the church) at the battle of Armageddon. Now, can the pretribulationalist have it both ways? Is it me or do you sense a contradiction? Please don't quote a passage to me that you maintain deals with the battle of Armageddon to prove the imminent return of Christ for the Rapture! Since pretribulationists insist that this passage refers to Armageddon, it cannot refer to the Rapture. One way or the other but not both ways at the same time, please.

However, this passage cannot refer to Armageddon; it must refer to the Rapture of the church. Two reasons can be given to support this conclusion. First, the passage is a warning to believers to be faithful. Notice that Mark 13:33-34 states,

Take heed, keep on the alert; for *you* do not know when the appointed time is. It is like a man, away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, *also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert*.

It is the Lord's people who must remain alert and not be found sleeping when the Lord returns. Such a warning makes no sense if it is referring to Armageddon since it is the wicked who will be judged at Armageddon. Therefore the need to be found faithful by the Lord at the Rapture is urgent. Second, the doorkeeper is commanded to stay alert and not be found sleeping when the master returns. This illustration loses all meaning unless the master is gone long enough for the slave to sleep. *Sleep* is not used in a literal sense, but figuratively for faithfulness. Therefore the Lord is not saying that the Rapture is imminent, but certain. *The urgency to be ready is in light of the certainty of the coming of the Lord, not the imminency of His coming.*

Romans 13:11

"Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed."

"*Is nearer.*" Again, the emphasis is not imminency, but certainty. Paul instructs the Romans that "The night is almost gone, and the day is near (Rom. 13:12a)." And as in the case with James 5:7-9, it is Paul's use again of the perfect tense in connection with the verb *eggiken* which means he is referring to a past event that has already occurred, with present day implications. As explained earlier, the perfect tense is not predicting something soon to happen but, on the contrary, something that has already taken place. Using the Greek verb in the perfect tense, Paul could not have been emphasizing imminency —something that the pretribulationalist says is still a future event that could occur at any moment — but what has already happened that makes the future certain. The day of ultimate salvation (not only from the power of sin but even from the temptation to sin) has drawn near. It is not in the process of drawing near. The process is completed. That day is a completed fact in the mind of God, therefore, "salvation is nearer to us than when we believed."

The certainty of the transition from one age to another is the emphasis that Paul is making in Romans 13:11-12. This is evidenced by three facts which Paul uses: "it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep," "salvation is nearer to us than when we believed," and "the night is almost gone, and the day is near." The time to awaken is now! If "the night is almost gone," the day is not imminent, i.e. with absolutely no time between some point of the night hour and the full light of day. Every second of the night must pass before it can be said to be "day." But if "the night is almost gone," then the coming of "day" is certain. This is the point that Paul is making.

Philippians 4:5

"Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near."

The word *near* is the English translation of the Greek adjective *eggus*. Pretribulationists insist that Paul's use of *eggus* in this passage supports their argument that the Rapture is imminent. They offer no proof other than the simple sense of the phrase itself.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (The Septuagint), Zephaniah 1:14 indicates, "Near (*eggus*) is the great day of the Lord, near and coming very quickly; listen, the day of the Lord." Thus, since Philippians 4:5 is using the same Greek word, it stands to reason that if the phrase "near is the great day of the Lord" means the Rapture is imminent, then likewise the day of God's wrath must also be imminent. One of the well-known modern articulators of pretribulationalism is Dr. John F. Walvoord. In his book, *The Church in Prophecy*, he writes, "…that the coming of the Day of the Lord is imminent." [2]

Suddenly we are confronted with a contradiction. By their own words, the pretribulational definition of imminency demands that "no prophecy *must* be fulfilled" for an event to be imminent. However, Scripture clearly indicates that certain very specific events *must* occur before the Day of the Lord comes. Joel 2:31 clearly states, "The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood *before* the great and awesome day of the Lord comes." (Italics added.) Malachi 4:5 states, "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet *before* the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord." (Italics added) 2 Thessalonians 2:3 states, "Let no one in any way deceive you, for it [the Day of the Lord] will not come unless the apostasy comes *first* and the man of lawlessness is revealed…." (Italics added)

Here are three events that are predicted to occur before the Day of the Lord comes. If the pretribulationist's definition of imminency is correct then the Bible is in error. God forbid! Dr. Walvoord is clearly incorrect in saying "that the coming of the Day of the Lord is imminent." That some portion of the ministry of Elijah must

take place before the Day of the Lord begins cannot be denied. Therefore, the Day of the Lord cannot be imminent in any sense and neither can the Rapture!

[2] John F. Walvoord, *The Church in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982) 85.

John 14:3

"If I go and prepare a place for you, I *will* come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also."

This is a wonderful verse that should give great comfort to every genuine believer. But does it refer to imminency? Would you stake your life on this verse teaching the any-moment return of Christ? Of course not, yet this is one of the three most popular passages used in trying to prove the point of the imminent return of Christ!

The fourteenth chapter of John's Gospel occurred on the night before the Lord was crucified. However, two nights before His crucifixion, the Lord told the same disciples that He did not know the day or hour of His return (Matt. 26:1, 24:36). If the Lord did not know when He would return, He could not indicate that His return would be *imminent*. In John 14:1 the Lord declares that the disciples do "believe in God," however, He commands that they start to "believe also in Me." The disciples were clearly in doubt about the Lord's return, having questioned Him about it the night before. The Lord offers a word of encouragement to the disciples in the sense that He will *certainly* return to take them to the prepared place. The point is certainty, not imminency. He is promising to return — no more, no less, plain and simple! There is absolutely no indication in the text about the timing of His return.

I John 2:28

"Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming."

Now here's another one. If you can find imminency in this statement, you are interested not in what the Scriptures teach, but what you want them to teach! John is simply stating that when Christ appears, we will not shrink away in shame. Timing has nothing to do with what he is saying. The point is faithfulness. Plain and simple! Judge for yourself.

I Thessalonians 1:10

"And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come."

Waiting, waiting… as every genuine Christian yearns in his heart, I wish He would get here! In the verb *to wait for* "…the thought of patience is predominate…" [3] The Apostle Paul emphasizes that this is one of the byproducts of the Thessalonians turning from idol worship to Christ. They turned from idols to serve the Father and to wait for His Son from heaven. What Paul declares is an attitude that was adopted by the Thessalonians at the point of salvation. It is misleading to suggest that the Thessalonians were waiting for the Lord and not "certain signs and events," simply because no signs and events are specifically stated in this particular passage.

In his first letter to the Thessalonian Christians, the Apostle does not offer us a list of the things the Thessalonians were to expect before Christ's return. He simply states the new attitude that comes as a result of the Thessalonians' salvation. However, in his second letter, in the second chapter, where confusion arises as to the timing of Christ's return, Paul spells it out, carefully so that the youngest Christian could not miss the precise sequence of events that had to occur before the Lord's return. First the apostasy, then the removal of the restrainer, then the rise of the man of lawlessness who takes his seat in the temple and demands the worship of the world, and then the appearing of Jesus Christ who will bring Antichrist to an end! (2 Thess. 2:1-8)

To demand that Paul delineate the sequence of events connected with the second coming of Christ every time he refers to it is foolish. Such a requirement is an unnecessary convention of modern interpreters of the Bible. In this particular passage, he is not discussing the ins and outs of the Rapture. Rather, he is focusing on the blessed hope of the believer.

[3] C.F. Hogg and W.E. Vine, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Fincastle: Scripture Truth Book Company, 1959) 46.

1 Corinthians 1:7
"So that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ…"

Once again, pretribulationists argue that in this passage, the Corinthians were looking for the imminent return of Christ and not signs. Their argument is based upon the fact that in this passage Paul does not offer a list of any signs. In their thinking, if the Corinthians were supposed to look for signs of Christ's coming, Paul would have mentioned them here. This is a wonderful example of arguing from silence. They argue that since Christ is the only object of the Corinthian's expectations, the Rapture must be imminent.

However, such reasoning fails to consider the context of 1 Corinthians 1:7. Paul is not discussing the full range of events that accompany the return of Christ. Rather, he is praising the Corinthians for their faith in Christ that evidences itself through the many spiritual gifts manifest among them and their *eager expectation* of the Lord's coming (*parousia*). The passage clearly is referring to expectation — awaiting eagerly — not an imminent return of Christ, plain and simple!

To demand a chronology of the end-time sequence based upon this one passage alone is foolish. When the writings of Paul to the Corinthians are compared with his writings to the Thessalonians, Paul clearly gives a sequence of events that must occur before we are delivered from the persecution of the "lawless one" at Christ's return. So, to say that Paul gives no signs concerning Christ's return means you have not taken the time to compare Scripture with Scripture.

1 Corinthians 16:22

"If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha." *Maranatha* (Our Lord, Come) is "an Aramaic formula which, according to Didache 10:6, was used in the early Christian liturgy of the Lord's Supper." [4] Joseph A. Fitzmyer states, "The best explanation of *maranatha* remains that of an ancient acclamation… [It is] an acclamation referring to Jesus' parousiac coming, understood at least as eschatological and regal…" [5] Therefore, it is nothing more than wishful thinking on the part of pretribulationists to insist that Paul's use of this acclamation argues for imminency. It is clear in the context of 1 Corinthians 16 that Paul is not setting forth the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ. His use of this expression is one of focus to set a spiritual magnetic north. Nothing more! The great hope of every believer is the "end of the age" when Christ will come and "[make] all things new." To demand that Paul must set forth a detailed understanding of Christ's return every time he mentions any aspect of that coming is a conclusion without any merit whatsoever.

[4] B.A.D.G. s.v. μαραν αθα. *The Didache aka The Teachings Of The Apostles*

[5] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *To Advance the Gospel: New Testament Studies* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 211.

Titus 2:13
"Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus…"

The pretribulationist again makes this passage a reference to an "any-moment" rapture of the church. He will ask, "How can we look for the blessed hope of the Rapture, if first we must undergo the persecution of the Antichrist?"

The key to understanding this important text penned by Paul is gaining a literal translation of the passage… *We should live godly lives while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.* It is significantly important for the reader to understand that the short phrase *blessed hope* here equates to the phrase *glorious appearing*. The blessed hope is not the Rapture. The blessed hope is the *glorious appearing* of Christ. His true identity, veiled for the ages, will finally come into view as He really is at His appearance. All creation will finally see the Son of God in all of His glory. This is our blessed hope. It is at this time that Christ will "slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end (2 Thess. 2:8-9)" the lawless one. It is at this time that the righteous will be delivered from the wrath of Satan (Rev 12:12) and the wicked who remain will be destroyed by God's wrath (Luke 17:26-30; Matt 24:37-39).

The appearing of Christ would be much more glorious for a believer suffering the persecution of Antichrist than it would be for those playing golf in 70 degree weather in Carmel, California, suddenly taken away to heaven. This is why Christ explained to His disciples in a Rapture-related discussion, that "the days shall come when you shall long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it… For just as the lightning flashes out of one part of the sky, shines to the other part of the sky, so will be the Son of Man in His day," (Luke 17:22, 24). Later, in His Temple Mount Discourse, Christ tells His disciples that when He comes in great power and glory, cutting short the persecution of Antichrist, the elect of God should "straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28)!

Illogical Arguments

So much for the passages used to prove imminency. If one's objective is truth first and foremost, one must honestly agree that the phantom doctrine of imminency is nowhere to be found in any of the passages used to prove this doctrine. But when Scripture is compared with Scripture, just the opposite is true!

But pretribulationists still attempt to save their ill-fated definition of an imminent return of Christ by using several illogical arguments. They write pages and pages arguing that the Olivet Discourse was written to the Jews and refers to Christ's coming at Armageddon at the end of Daniel's Seventieth Week. Yet, if you ask them, "When will the Rapture occur?" many will answer, "The Bible says no man knows the day or hour." It escapes their notice that those words are taken from Matthew 24:36, a passage they make applicable to the battle of Armageddon, in an effort to escape the clear signs of Christ's *parousia*. Now, the Olivet Discourse cannot refer to Armageddon at every point, and in this one verse, refer to the Rapture of the church. You cannot have your cake and eat it too! That's illogical.

Some pretribulationists will also argue at length that the seven churches of Revelation depict seven periods of church history. By definition, the Rapture must occur during the sixth period that is represented by the Philadelphian Church. The Laodicean Church would then represent the unfaithful professing church of the tribulation period. Question: how can you have an imminent Rapture from the day the Lord ascended to heaven forty days after His resurrection and at the same time demand that the seven churches represent seven periods of church history? If the Rapture occurs during the sixth period represented by the Philadelphian church, then all would know prior to the "Philadelphian" period that Christ is not due to come until then. Again, this is an illogical argument on the part of some.

Pretribulationists are adamant that the Seventieth Week of Daniel must begin soon after the Rapture occurs. Yet, even though the Seventieth Week begins with a covenant between Antichrist and Israel (now back in their own homeland) they see no problem with the fact that the nation of Israel remained separated from the land until 1948. How could the Rapture have occurred before Israel returned to the land?

Pretribulationists argued for many years that the Rapture has been possible at any moment from the day the church began at Pentecost until the present moment. But this position met with unyielding criticism. How could the Rapture be imminent before the prophesied destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (Luke 21:12-24)? How could the Rapture happen at any moment before the prophesied death of the Apostle Peter (John 21:18)? These and other questions concerning the first 70

years [from the ascension of Christ until the writing of the book of Revelation] present such a compelling problem for an any-moment Rapture that Dr. John F. Walvoord is forced to admit that: “at the outset it must be observed that most of the hindrances to the coming of the Lord at any moment in the first century no longer exist…. Most of the difficulties to an imminent return have been resolved.” [6] How convenient! I beg to differ. If there were problems with the doctrine in the first century, there are problems with the doctrine in the twentieth century. If the Rapture was not imminent the first seventy years after Christ’s ascension, it’s not imminent now.

[6] John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979) 166.

3: The Conclusion

The early church fathers and the reformers believed the Lord would return during their lifetime.

What was the cause of [this] paradox? Both the fathers and the reformers interpreted everything in the light of their circumstances. The fathers thought that they were in the Tribulation because they were being persecuted by the Roman emperor, the supposed Antichrist. The reformers thought they were in the Tribulation because they were being persecuted by the Pope, the supposed Antichrist.[1]

[1] Robert G. Gromacki, “The Imminent Return of Jesus Christ,” *GJ* 6 (Fall 1965) 21.

In reality, the fathers and the reformers were correct in so far as they held to a “post persecution” return of Christ to rapture the church. Since each thought they were in the Tribulation of Antichrist as depicted by the Lord in Matthew 24, in their eyes the Rapture could not be imminent. This fact does not prove the point, but the weight of the opinions of the church fathers, many of which were taught directly by the apostles, is compelling. All except Origen (the father of the allegorical method of interpretation that has dominated the Catholic church for 1700 years) believed in a very real Antichrist, where a very real persecution would help prepare the true church for the return of Christ. Yet, those holding to the pretrib Rapture

position, in order to make these men appear to teach imminency, distort the words of the early church fathers. The quotes of the early church fathers are twisted, just like they twist Scripture to teach the phantom doctrine of an any-moment Rapture, a doctrine that doesn't exist! John F. Walvoord in a clear attempt to gain favorable support from the early church fathers, used the following quote from the *Didache*: "Watch for your life's sake. Let not your lamps be quenched, nor your loins unloosed; but be ye ready, for you know not the hour in which our Lord cometh." Dr. Walvoord's quotation taken from the *Didache* certainly seems to support an any-moment return of Christ until one looks at the entire quote! Notice what follows Dr. Walvoord's quote, But often shall you come together, seeking the things which are befitting your souls: for the whole time of your faith will not profit you, if ye be not made perfect in the last time. For in the last days false prophets and corrupters shall be multiplied… and then shall appear the *world-deceiver* as Son of God, and shall do signs and wonders, and the earth shall be delivered into his hands, and he shall do iniquitous things which have never yet come to pass since the beginning… And then shall appear the signs of the truth; first, the sign of an *outspreading in heaven*; then the sign of the sound of the trumpet; and the third, the resurrection of the dead… Then shall the world see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven.[2]

[2] Italics added.

It's sad to see the length some will go to prove a doctrine that doesn't exist. The early church fathers were clearly looking for signs that will signal the return of the Lord, the signs indicated in the Olivet Discourse of Christ. There is nothing imminent about the Rapture. Christ delineates the timing of the Rapture in the Olivet Discourse so clearly, teaching anything but an "any-moment," imminent return of Christ for His elect.