

# How Many Second Comings?

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Dr. Thomas Ice, of the *Pretrib Research Center*, argued that differences in terminology in various second coming passages require a separate pretribulation rapture, distinct from the second coming.<sup>1</sup>

Ice began with a discussion of what pretribulationists really need to prove. Not surprisingly, he sets the bar for his side extremely low.

*"The pretribulationist must show that there is enough dissimilarity between clear rapture and clear second advent passages as to warrant the claim that the two kinds of passages could be speaking about two events which could occur at different times. The pretribulationist does not have to prove at this point . . . that the two events must occur at different times, but only that the exegetical data from rapture and second advent passages do not make it impossible for the events to occur at different times. If he can do that, the pretribulationist has shown that his view is not impossible. And, he has answered the posttribulationist's strongest line of evidence."*

The burden of proof established here by Ice, even if met, would merely make pretribulationism possible but not proven or even probable. That really doesn't go very far in proving pretribulationism, or disproving posttribulationism. But, even if we allow such a low burden of proof, and if pretribulationists need to show "*only that the exegetical data from rapture and second advent passages do not make it impossible for the events to occur at different times,*" they are already in trouble in several major passages. Posttribulationists have frequently pointed out that the "first resurrection" is in a posttribulation context in Rev. 20, making another resurrection seven years earlier impossible. The "last trumpet" is associated with the rapture in 1 Cor. 15, making it impossible for this to occur 7 years before the great trumpet blown by Christ to gather His elect "*immediately after the tribulation*" in Matt. 24:29-31. The hope of relief from persecution is connected to the posttribulation event in 2 Thess. 1:4-10. And Paul wrote that at least two major events (one being the abomination of desolation) must occur before the rapture in 2 Thess. 2:1-3. Yet, when presented with these hard evidences, which "*make it impossible for the events to occur at different times,*" pretribulationists typically argue for two "last trumpets," and two "first resurrections," or bend the language in such a way as to force it to accommodate their view. One could argue that the cosmic disturbances (sun and moon darkened) occur twice at different times, as some pretribulationists also do, in order to escape the problem of a posttribulation "Day

of the Lord." If one is willing to take these kinds of liberties with the text, then it might be possible to meet the very low burden of proof that Ice has set for himself.

To his credit, in the rest of his article, Ice set out to do more than just show pretribulationism as a possibility. He set out to show that separating the rapture from the second coming is demanded by the evidence. His method was to point out alleged differences between the rapture and the second coming. Most of his arguments are based on certain details mentioned in a "rapture" passage that are not mentioned in a particular "second coming" passage. This is an argument from silence. He assumed that if something is not mentioned in a particular passage, it could not have occurred during that event. But, using precisely the same logic, one could argue that the synoptic Gospels and John present two different Jesus Christ's because the accounts are substantially different. John includes many things not mentioned in the synoptic Gospels, and they mention things that are missing from John. Yet, **merely looking for differences in two accounts does not indicate that they are referring to different things or events UNLESS the accounts are mutually exclusive**. That is, if the details of one account are impossible to harmonize with the details of another account, only then can it be said with any certainty that the accounts are describing two different things or events. Therefore, the burden of proof Thomas Ice really needs to meet is to show that the "rapture" and "second coming" are mutually exclusive, and cannot be harmonized into a single event.

Since both pretribulationists and premillennial posttribulationists agree on the general framework (that Scripture teaches Christ's second coming after a future tribulation and gathering of Jesus' elect at that time {cf. Matt. 24:29-31}), the burden of proof is on the pretribulationists to show:

- That Scripture clearly indicates ANOTHER coming of Christ before the second coming, or
- That Scripture demands, by mutually exclusive statements, the separation of the rapture from the second coming by a distinct period of time

While we can accept the possibility that certain things were kept secret or were not understood in ancient times, (as many pretribulationists say of their secret rapture), if this argument is employed, we need to see the POINT OF INTRODUCTION of the new (allegedly secret) concept in the progressive revelation of Scripture. It is not enough to show that the rapture COULD BE a distinct event not related to the second coming. We are attempting to discover what the prophetic Scriptures TEACH, not what the prophetic Scripture could permit or allow, if we turn them every which way but loose! The Scriptures PERMIT the idea that the other planets are inhabited by people too. But,

who is going to say that the Bible TEACHES such a thing? Therefore, even if we grant the possibility of the rapture being a "mystery" in the Old Testament, or even during Christ's earthly ministry, such a "mystery" must have been revealed at some point in time to the Church. And if so, there should be a clear explanation in the New Testament of what was once hidden. And, there must be a point of INTRODUCTION of the revelation of such a "mystery." Therefore, the burden of proof that pretribulationists must meet is to show that Scripture DEMANDS a pretribulation rapture distinct and prior to the events of the second coming and the tribulation. Ice also needs to identify the point in time when this new revelation emerged into the body of Christian teaching.

Ice cites the Trinity doctrine as being derived exclusively from inferences in another attempt at lowering the bar for his side. True enough, the Trinity is developed largely from inferences. However, the inferences that point to the Trinity are **necessary inferences**, even though the entire doctrine is not explicitly taught in one single passage. **What Ice and other pretribulationists must do is show that the Scriptures TEACH a pretribulation rapture. This can be done in either of two ways.**

First - **explicitly**, by plain statements of Scripture that the rapture is before the tribulation, or before any specific event that we know occurs during the tribulation. (Well known pretribulationists have already conceded that they cannot do this).

Second - **implicitly**, by showing that the rapture and second coming each contain details that are mutually exclusive (that cannot be harmonized).

Simply showing that the rapture and second coming COULD occur at different times proves nothing at all, and should convince no thinking person of anything. Further, in order to meet this burden, one must deal with the second coming passages exhaustively. While someone might pick and choose a couple of passages, that when compared, could permit a pretribulation rapture, if there are ANY passages at all that demand that the rapture is a part of the second coming, then pretribulationism must fall.

An additional "coming" of Christ, that they admit is nowhere taught in Old Testament prophecy, is a radical alteration of, or addition to, the progressive prophetic revelation of Scripture from Genesis to Malachi. If their pretribulation rapture is nowhere taught in the Old Testament, then they need to show where it is explicitly taught in the New Testament. Merely relying on inference regarding such an important doctrine illustrates the weakness of their case to begin with. But, if they are going to attempt to make their case from inferences alone, those inferences had better be air-tight. That is, each

inference must be DEMANDED by the context. Otherwise, when all is said and done, they have proven nothing at all.

Ice claims that posttribulationists are in the same boat, having to rely exclusively on inferences. He writes, *"Posttribulationists often contend that the pretribulation position is built merely built upon an assumption that certain verses 'make sense' if and only if the pretribulation model of the rapture is assumed to be correct. However, they often fail to make it clear to their readers that they are just as dependent upon assumptions as they say pretribulationists are. Their error stems from failure to observe actual biblical distinctions."*

Ice is simply incorrect here. Not only can posttribulationists give explicit teaching (using the grammatical - historical {literal} hermeneutic) that the rapture is posttribulational, but we can also give direct explicit teaching that precludes the possibility of a pretribulation rapture. Now that is setting the bar much higher for posttribulationists than Ice has done for pretribulationists! We have already provided the evidence for this in our first section, "Answers RE: the Rapture."

### **Arguments from Silence**

When comparing Scripture with Scripture, Ice's repeated reliance on an "argument from silence" is not a valid proof of anything. "Mutual exclusivity" is the only valid way to prove the kind of dichotomy Ice is seeking to show between the rapture and second coming.

An "**argument from silence**," when comparing two passages, assumes that since one account leaves out something included in another account, the two accounts must be speaking of different things or events. But, this conclusion is illogical. Take two independent witnesses to a crime for example. When interviewed separately, would we expect both witnesses to reveal precisely all the same details? Would we conclude that because one witness' account had details not included in the other's, and vice versa, that they witnessed two different crimes? Of course not. Let's suppose one witness said that the perpetrator of a robbery wore blue jeans and sun glasses. The other witness said he had on a tee-shirt and tennis shoes. Are we forced to conclude that these are different crimes? No. All of these details COULD be true of the same person. The differences between the two accounts are easily explained by the fact that each witness observed or remembered different details, or saw things from a different perspective. Yet this is precisely the kind of argument Ice repeatedly used in his attempt to isolate the rapture from the second coming.

"**Mutual exclusivity**" is quite different. This kind of argument says that if the details of one account cannot be harmonized with the details of the other, then logically we must

conclude that the events are different events. Let's take our above example. Two people witness a robbery. One witness says the perpetrator was a black male with a gun, who drove away in a blue Nissan pickup truck. The other witness says it was a white male with a knife, who rode off on a bicycle. With these details, we should probably conclude that these two witnesses did not witness the same crime. Since one witness said the perpetrator was a black male, and the second witness said he was a white male, these details are mutually exclusive (each excludes the other). He cannot be both. The same applies to the weapon and the getaway vehicle. Mutual exclusivity is a way to implicitly prove something. An argument from silence proves nothing at all.

Before we address the specific issues Ice has raised, let's test these two approaches on a few rapture - second coming passages. First, compare two passages that both Ice and myself agree are posttribulation second coming passages, Matt. 24:29-31 and Rev. 19. In Matthew, we have "*the sign of the Son of Man*" appearing in the heavens. Nothing of the kind is mentioned in Rev. 19. We have Christ's sounding the trumpet, and dispatching His angels to gather Jesus' elect. Nothing like this can be found in Rev. 19. Conversely, in Rev. 19, we have Christ dressed in a garment dipped in blood, riding a white horse, with His army (probably angelic) in tow also dressed in white and on horseback. Nothing of the kind can be found in Matt. 24. If we apply Ice's argument from silence to these passages, we are forced to conclude that Matt. 24:29-31 occurs at a different time, and is completely distinct from the coming to battle in Rev. 19! But, Matt. 24:29 explicitly states that this coming occurs "*immediately after the tribulation.*" And, Rev. 19 chronologically places that coming immediately after the tribulation. What we have done here is TESTED Ice's method on a control group. This is the scientific method of testing a test to make sure the test is valid. It is done by applying the test to a situation where the correct results are already known beforehand. If the test results agree with what is already known beforehand, then that test COULD BE a valid test. If it fails in the control group, then it is NOT a valid test, and must be discarded. Any results gained from using a test that has failed when applied to a control group will be unreliable at best.

In our above test, we already knew that our control group of two passages both refer to Christ's posttribulation coming. If applying the test to those passages gave the same result, then the test could be valid. In this case, the test indicated that they are two completely different comings of Christ. Therefore, Ice's argument from silence is not a valid test. That leaves the mutual exclusivity test as the only valid way for Ice to show that the rapture occurs at a different time than the second coming.

When we use the mutually exclusivity test on the same two passages, what are the results? Do any of the details given in Matt. 24:29-31 preclude the details given in Rev.

19? No, not one. Even though there are several things unique to each passage, both can be harmonized together with all of their details intact. We can combine the two accounts into a "harmony" just as we combine the four Gospels into a "Harmony of the Gospels." In this case, the scenario would go something like this: The sun and moon are darkened. The sign of the Son of Man appears in the sky. Heaven opens, Jesus and His army of angels descend to the atmosphere of the earth riding on white horses. When they arrive in the clouds, Jesus sounds the trumpet, and the army of angels fan out to *"gather together His elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of heaven to the uttermost part of the earth."* All the tribes of the earth mourn as they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Jesus then begins His descent to the Mount of Olives, and destroys the Antichrist and his armies. While the two accounts are quite dissimilar, they are NOT mutually exclusive. Therefore, since the results of the mutual exclusivity test agrees with what we already know to be true about these two passages (both are descriptions of Christ's posttribulation coming), our "mutual exclusivity" test passes as a potentially reliable test. Both passages are speaking of the same coming of Christ, and our test shows the same result.

Let's do a similar test on two passages that we all agree are "rapture" passages, 1 Cor. 15:50-54 & 1 Thess. 4:13-18. The result is known. Both passages speak of the same coming. In 1 Cor. 15, the resurrection of the body and changing of the living saints into incorruptible bodies are explicitly mentioned. Yet, there is no hint of the "translation" (catching up) of the saints, described in 1 Thess. 4. There are other notable differences as well. 1 Thess. 4 mentions the descent of the Lord, and the shout of Michael, neither of which are mentioned in 1 Cor. 15. Using Ice's argument from silence, we would be forced to conclude that 1 Cor. 15 is speaking of a different coming than 1 Thess. 4! But what of the fact that both passages make specific mention of the resurrection of the saints? Does that not connect the passages? Yes it does. But, the posttribulation coming is specifically said to have a resurrection too. So, any use of similarities to connect the passages also indicates that clear posttribulation passages are speaking of the same coming, too. The results of this test are the same as our comparison of Matt. 24 & Rev. 19. The mutual exclusivity test gives the results we know to be true, and the argument from silence once again fails to agree with the known results.

We must decide whether to connect these passages based on their similarities or else distinguish them based on their distinctive features. Just what should our rule be? Here's the rule that passes all of our control group tests. **If different accounts of Christ's coming do not contain any details that are mutually exclusive, there is no reason to distinguish them as different events. We should assume they are the same UNLESS "mutual exclusivity" demands otherwise.** Unless Dr. Ice employs this test

alone in his attempt to distinguish the rapture from the second coming, his results mean nothing. Appealing to an argument from silence is meaningless.

This rule works fine in our control groups, is perfectly logical, and is therefore a valid rule. It works well for harmonizing 1 Cor. 15 and 1 Thess. 4 as both referring to the "rapture." It also works fine with our first "control group" when we compared Matt. 24 & Rev. 19. The problem for pretribulationists is this: When we consistently apply the only legitimate rule for determining whether two passages refer to the same event, that same rule also indicates that the rapture and second coming are not to be distinguished. There are no details given in an acknowledged "rapture" passage that are not compatible with details of any acknowledged "second coming" passages. All of these can be harmonized into a single account, taking into consideration every detail of every passage. I realize that some might be skeptical of such a bold claim. But, I assure you, if there were incompatible details, Dr. Ice, the executive director of the Pretrib Research Center, would have pointed them out. As any intelligent person would do when presenting their case, we would expect Dr. Ice to put forward his strongest arguments. Here they are.

Ice offers 13 examples of differences between the rapture and second coming. We'll take them in the same order.

***"1. Translation of all believers, vs. No translation at all"***

It is already obvious that Ice is relying solely on an argument from silence. He has identified 1 Thess. 4 as the "rapture" which specifically mentions the "translation" or "catching up" of believers. His point is that none of the passages he has identified as posttribulation include this detail.

Ice's argument is quite selective, picking only the "translation" (catching up) aspect. There is nothing here that is mutually exclusive with posttribulation passages. Therefore, Ice has proven nothing at all, except that he is using a faulty and selective criterion for judging these passages, and is ignoring the application of the same principle to other passages that prove the criteria he is employing completely wrong.

Furthermore, we have a clear passage that Ice would agree is posttribulation, which does indeed refer to the catching up of the saints after the tribulation. Matt. 24:29-31 and the parallel passage in Mark 13 state that *"immediately after the tribulation"* Jesus will come in the clouds of heaven, send forth His angels by blowing a trumpet, and they will ***"gather together His elect"*** from both earth and heaven. How does Dr. Ice suppose the angels will gather the Elect from the four corners of the earth in Matt. 24? Unless this is done by air, the only alternative is for the angels to apply for passports and take ships, busses, trains, and automobiles. So, while Matt. 24:29-31 does not explicitly state

HOW the angels will gather Jesus' elect, it is strongly implied that it will be by "catching up" (harpazo) just as 1 Thess. 4 mentions explicitly. So the one feature Ice has picked to distinguish his pretribulation rapture from the second coming is implicitly taught in a clear posttribulation passage! Also, there is nothing in 1 Thess. 4's "catching up" that would exclude it being accomplished by the angels at Christ's signal using the "trump of God." This scenario is perfectly compatible with Matt. 24:29-31 as well as 1 Thess. 4. In fact, when comparing Matt. 24:29-31 to 1 Thess. 4:13-18, one cannot help but be struck by the apparent reliance of Paul on the words of Christ. There are quite a few details in common in both passages. Jesus spoke of His "coming in the clouds." So did Paul. Jesus spoke of the "trumpet." So did Paul. Jesus spoke of the angels. Paul mentioned at least Michael. Jesus spoke of the gathering of the elect. So did Paul. It is hard to believe that the Thessalonian recipients of Paul's letter would fail to notice this connection!

### ***"2. Translated saints go to heaven, vs. Translated saints return to earth"***

Here, Ice assumes what he is trying to prove. Where in any text of Scripture does it say that translated saints go to heaven? That is something Ice has merely assumed without providing any biblical proof. Surely, his "rapture" text in 1 Thess 4 does not suggest this. The saints are caught up into the "air," from then on to *"ever be with the Lord."* Where they go from their meeting place in the clouds is wholly dependent on where the Lord goes from there. This text does not say. This is clearly an attempt at using the "mutual exclusivity" argument. But, before such an argument can have any weight, Ice must first produce the passages (rightly interpreted) that state believers are destined for heaven after the "translation." He has not done so, nor can he do so. One cannot seriously argue that the facts are mutually exclusive if he has fabricated the facts! Therefore, once again, Ice has proven nothing.

### ***"3. Earth not judged, vs. Earth judged & righteousness established"***

Here, Ice again argues from silence. The passages he has identified as "rapture" passages do not mention the earth being judged at the coming of Christ for which the Thessalonians were waiting. Or do they? The one passage Ice and other pretribulationists rely most heavily on as being exclusively a "rapture" passage, is 1 Thess. 4:13-18. But, Paul did not stop speaking about the rapture in verse 18, but continued into chapter 5. Paul stated plainly that *"sudden destruction"* will overtake those who are not *"watching"* for this coming of Christ (which Ice has identified as the "rapture"). It will occur *"as a thief in the night"* (unexpectedly) for unbelievers, who will be met with *"sudden destruction."* But, because true believers will be watching, we will not be caught by surprise. *"But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that **this Day** should overtake you as a thief"* (1 Thess. 5:4). The same coming of Christ, just mentioned in chapter 4, will devastate the wicked with *"sudden destruction."* While Ice might want to



stretch "*sudden destruction*" out for seven years of plagues, the word "sudden" hardly permits such a stretch. It is quite clear that the same coming for which the Thessalonians were watching with anticipation would bring "*sudden destruction*" on the wicked. Ice's own "rapture passage" defies his false dichotomy. Likewise, when we examine 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10, we find that the coming of Christ, whereby He will provide "rest" from persecution for His suffering church, will occur "*when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day*" (2 Thess. 1:7-10). This alleged distinction by Ice again fails because the very text he uses for his "rapture text" in context disproves his assertion that the wicked are not to be judged at the time of the rapture. We have provided at least two passages that link the rapture with the sudden destruction of the wicked.

***"4. Imminent, any-moment, signless, vs. Follows definite predicted signs including tribulation"***

This argument is similar to the # 3 above. Ice's premise, that the Bible teaches the rapture is now "imminent," is false. This is an attempt at using "mutual exclusivity." If Ice could prove that the rapture is "imminent," then his point would be valid. But, he has not done so, nor can he do so. We will deal in depth with the "imminence" claims in the next article in this series. Ice has once again set up a false dichotomy.

***"5. Not in the Old Testament, vs. Predicted often in Old Testament"***

This is a circular argument, which is an illogical argument. Ice is asking us to assume what he is trying to prove — that the rapture and second coming are distinct events separated by a considerable period of time. But, if that assumption is false, and if there is only one coming of Christ yet future, then all of the Old Testament passages that speak of the coming of Christ refer to the same event. If Ice is suggesting that the "translation" of living believers is not specifically mentioned in these Old Testament passages, well, neither is it mentioned in 1 Cor. 15, as we have shown above! Neither is it mentioned in ANY OTHER passage that Ice would admit refers to the rapture! There is only one passage in the New Testament that explicitly refers to the "catching up" of the saints to the air (1 Thess. 4:17). And there is one more that strongly implies it, but this passage is clearly posttribulation (Matt. 24:29-31). At best, Ice can ONLY claim that the actual "catching up" of the living is not mentioned in the Old Testament. But, other details of the rapture most definitely do find their counterparts in Old Testament prophecy, including both the trumpet blast (Isa. 27:13) and the resurrection of the saints (Dan. 12:1-2).

***"6. Believers only, vs. Affects all men"***

These two things are not mutually exclusive. Paul states that the *"dead in Christ"* rise, and *"we who are alive and remain"* will be caught up. That means, only the saved are resurrected and caught up. Daniel does precisely the same thing in Dan. 12:1-3. Only SOME of those who sleep in the dust will come forth at the resurrection of the just. Should we argue then that Daniel's resurrection is pretribulational because it affects only believers? If so, then we have an Old Testament passage that clearly speaks of the rapture, and Ice's last point is refuted. But, if the fact that only the righteous are raised in Dan. 12 does not exclude this passage from linkage to the posttribulation coming, then neither does any other that speaks of the effect of the rapture only on believers. As we pointed out already, in the main "rapture" passage (1 Thess. 4), Paul went on to say in the following verses that those not watching will be on the receiving end of *"sudden destruction."* And Paul was clearly still speaking of the SAME coming, because he warned believers to be watching for this coming (1 Thess. 5:1-9). The same principle applies to 2 Thess. 1:4-10. It is the SAME COMING of Christ that provides relief from persecution for the saints and destruction of the wicked! At best, all Ice can really claim is that SOME passages that speak specifically of the rapture do not mention the effect of this coming on the wicked. But, since other passages do so, his argument is not valid. Nor would it be valid even if no other passages made this connection, because it is still an argument from silence.

***"7. Before the day of wrath, vs. Concluding the day of wrath"***

The flaw in this argument is the same as #4. Ice has not proven his facts. How does he define the "Day of wrath?" He does not say. The Bible uses the term synonymously with the "Day of the Lord" (cf. Zeph. 1:14-15). Ice cannot produce from Scripture a coming of Christ BEFORE this "day of wrath." It can be easily shown that the Day of the Lord is after the tribulation (the day of Christ's coming) and is not identical to the tribulation. Zech. 14:7 indicates that the Day of the Lord has a "morning" and an "evening" just as the days of creation (which we accept as a literal 24 hour day for that reason). Creationists therefore must reject the idea that the "Day of the Lord" is an extended period of time. It also states that it is "one day." Zeph. 2:4 also mentions that the Day of the Lord has a "noon." Ice's argument simply cannot be proven from Scripture, and is therefore invalid.

***"8. No reference to Satan, vs. Satan bound"***

This argument is another case of "arguing from silence," and is easily disproved. There is only ONE passage that makes specific reference to Satan's being bound in relation to Christ's coming — Rev. 19-20. None of the other multitude of acknowledged posttribulation passages mention this detail. Are we to suppose that Rev. 19-20 is the

ONLY passage in the Bible that refers to Christ's posttribulation coming? No. Then neither should we conclude that Satan is not bound immediately following the rapture in 1 Thess. 4 (just as we must assume so in Matt. 24:29-31). And since 2 Thess. 1:4-10 indicates plainly that our relief from persecution will come when Jesus comes to destroy the wicked, *"with His mighty angels in flaming fire,"* and since there is no question that this event is parallel to what we see in Rev. 19 — Christ's coming with His angelic army to defeat the Beast and his armies — we are forced to conclude that the rapture occurs immediately prior to the binding of Satan mentioned in Rev. 20:1-3. Besides, according to Rev. 20, the binding of Satan occurs after Christ's coming and not during it. We would not reasonably expect it to be mentioned in other passages that speak exclusively of His coming.

***"9. Christ comes for His own, vs. Christ comes with His own"***

The "for" vs. "with" argument meets the same fate as the rest. Ice's own "rapture passage" speaks of Christ's coming both "for" and "with" His saints **at the same coming**. Paul wrote those who *"sleep in Jesus will God bring WITH Him"* when He descends from heaven **FOR** the living (1 Thess. 4:14). What Ice and other pretribulationists fail to see is the single second coming of Christ has two parts. In the first part, Christ descends from heaven **with** His angels and the souls of those who *"sleep in Jesus."* This first descent is from heaven to the air, or just above the clouds. It is at this time He sounds the trumpet, raises the bodies of the dead saints, and catches up the living. All are assembled and "meet" Christ in the air. Then the whole multitude of risen and changed saints is displayed to the whole world in great glory against the backdrop of a darkened sun and moon, as they all descend with Him from the air to the Mount of Olives. In the posttribulation scenario, Christ comes **WITH** His saints who have died — the souls of those who *"sleep in Jesus"* accompanying His descent from heaven to the clouds above the earth. After then sounding the trumpet, raising the dead believers, and dispatching the angels to "catch up" the living who remain, He descends with **ALL** His saints to the Mount of Olives. The same coming from heaven to the clouds is **FOR** *"we who are alive and remain."* And it is **WITH** those who *"sleep in Jesus."* Then all the saints will be revealed to the world in glory with Christ, and descend with Him to the Mount of Olives. Once again, Ice has established a false dichotomy which cannot be sustained with Scripture. All the details can be easily harmonized into a single account.

***"10. He comes in the air, vs. He comes to the earth"***

This argument is really the same as the previous one. A two-step descent of the Lord explains both His coming to the air, and His coming to the earth. Christ's stop in mid-air to gather together His living elect is merely for the purpose of transportation and collecting the bodies of the dead in Christ from all over the globe. Gathering all the elect from the remote places of the earth to a single location, where we will be revealed to the

world in glory with Christ at His coming, is a necessary step. The "rapture" is simply an integral part of the second coming. Coming to the air and coming to the earth are not mutually exclusive, but are easily harmonized into a single event. Any descent to earth demands coming to the air first. It certainly does not demand a different coming, as Ice suggests.

***"11. He claims His bride, vs. He comes with His bride"***

According to Rev. 19:7, the Bride has just "*made herself ready*" at the very close of the tribulation! That is when the people in heaven announce that the time for the "*Marriage of the Lamb is come.*" According to A.T. Robertson: "*Is come (hlyen). Prophetic aorist, come at last.*" The aorist tense implies a suddenness, completeness, or wholeness of the event. In this case, the time for the "*marriage of the Lamb*" has just arrived. Also, regarding the Bride's making herself ready, "*made ready*" is also aorist active indicative, implying she has just now finally made herself ready. Immediately, heaven opens and Christ descends. Contrary to what pretribulationists think, the marriage of the Lamb is not said to occur in heaven. The scene in the first part of Revelation 19 is that of the Groom about to depart to go and fetch His bride. That is the reason for the excitement and anticipation in heaven because, "The bride has made herself ready." The time for the marriage has finally come at the extreme end of the tribulation! If Christ had come to claim His bride at the beginning of the tribulation in Revelation, as Ice thinks, then why the seven year delay before she is finally ready to be married? It is much better to conclude that the exclamation at the very end of the tribulation, the Bride has "*made herself ready*" for the wedding, and the time for the "*marriage of the Lamb*" has finally arrived, both indicating a posttribulation wedding. If the Bride's becoming ready and the marriage are posttribulation, then the "claiming" of the bride at the rapture is more likely to be posttribulation as well. Otherwise we have the extremely awkward scenario of Christ's coming for His Bride seven years before she is ready for the wedding, and taking her into His house seven years prior to their being married! Once again, Ice has assumed what he is trying to prove. And his assumptions flow counter to the facts revealed in Revelation, and with the Jewish wedding customs.

***"12. Only His own see Him, vs. Every eye shall see Him"***

Where does Ice get the idea that only believers see Christ at His coming? No passage of Scripture says so. In fact, John anticipated the rapture with joyful expectation when he wrote, "*Behold He comes with clouds! and every eye shall see Him...*" (Rev. 1:7). Ice is fabricating "facts" in order to allege "mutually exclusivity" of other facts stated in Scripture.

***"13. Tribulation begins, vs. Millennial Kingdom begins"***

Where in Scripture does the tribulation follow the rapture? Again, Ice is fabricating his facts. Ice then makes the following statement; *"John Walvoord concludes that these 'contrasts should make it evident that the translation of the church is an event quite different in character and time from the return of the Lord to establish His kingdom, and confirms the conclusion that the translation takes place before the tribulation.'"* As we have shown, additional details provided by one passage but not another are not "contrasts." Nor are fabricated "details" that conflict with genuine details legitimate "contrasts." Also, even IF all of the above points were valid contrasts and proved that the rapture and second coming will occur at different times, Walvoord's and Ice's conclusion from them is not valid. The pre-wrath view could absorb all of the above points as being true contrasts, and still maintain a pre-wrath rapture (being just a few months or weeks before the second coming). None of the above false contrasts, if true, would make the rapture seven years before the second coming, or necessitate a pre-70th week rapture.

### **Additional (Alleged) Distinctions**

In this section Ice repeated some of the above points, and added a couple more. The first additional point was to appeal to the "rapture" as being a "mystery." He cites 1 Cor. 15:51-54 to support his claim. But, what does this passage mention? There is no rapture specifically mentioned in this passage! There is only the resurrection of the dead and changing of the living. By Ice's own standards, this should not be a "rapture" passage! Additionally, if the "mystery" was a pretribulation rapture, we would expect Paul to explain that the rapture is pretribulational after saying, *"behold I show you a mystery."* But he does no such thing!

Ice has made two glaring errors here. First, the word "mystery" was not applied by Paul to the catching up of the saints, the coming of the Lord, the "rapture," the tribulation, or anything related to TIMING. Paul stated clearly what this "mystery" was that he was about to reveal. He wrote, *"Behold, I show you a mystery, we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed."* That is the "mystery" according to Paul. Not all believers will die, but all will be changed. In other words, some will be changed via resurrection, but others will be changed without dying at all! Ice would have us believe that the "mystery" is that the rapture is pretribulational, and not the same coming as the second coming after the tribulation. But, without the rapture itself being mentioned, the tribulation, or the timing of any events, it is hard to support such an assumption. Paul would not tell the Corinthians, *"Behold, I show you a mystery"* and then utterly fail to explain to them what this "mystery" was! Rather, the "mystery" Paul wished to reveal to the Corinthians was merely a distinction between the resurrecting of some and the transformation without dying of others.

Secondly, the word "mystery" is consistently misrepresented by Ice and other dispensationalists. Scripture most often uses the term in the sense of something heard (or known) but not fully understood. Ice uses the term as something wholly unheard-of heretofore. Please see Mark 4:1-12 for a good example of "mystery" meaning something heard but not fully understood.

The second additional "contrast" cited by Ice has to do with John 14:1-3, where he interprets "*my Father's house*" as heaven, something not supported by Jesus' earlier usage of the term, "*My Father's house*" (cf. John 2:16:17), or with the common expression in the Old Testament, "*the house of the Lord*" (cf. Isa. 2:2-4, Joel 3:18, Zech. 14:21).

### **Alleged Posttribulation Problems**

**Problem #1** — Ice writes: "*First, posttribulationism requires that the church will be present during the 70th week of Daniel (Dan. 9:24-27) even though it was absent from the first 69. This is in spite of the fact that Daniel 9:24 says that all 70 weeks are for Israel. Pretribulationism is not in conflict with this passage, as is posttribulationism, since the church departs before the beginning of the seven-year period.*"

We agree that the New Covenant Church began after the end of the 69th week. But, why is it a problem that the Church is on earth in the 70th week? Is there some reason why God cannot work on a spiritual and national level at the same time? The destruction of Jerusalem, which occurred in AD70, was included in the 70 weeks prophecy too (Dan. 9:26). And this was fulfilled some forty years into the "Church age." Ice's statement that the 70th week is for Israel also presents a non-existent problem. Surely, Ice will acknowledge that there is a large number of "tribulation saints" from every tribe and nation still on earth in the 70th week. Are they excluded from the 70th week on the grounds that they are not mentioned in the 70 weeks prophecy too? Will everyone on earth be raptured before the 70th week because it is for Israel? Does not Rev. 3:10 state clearly that the "*hour of temptation,*" which pretribulationists take as the entire 70th week, will come upon "*all them that dwell upon the earth?*" These things prove that the 70th week is not EXCLUSIVELY a time for Israel, but others are involved as well, despite the fact that they are not specifically mentioned in Dan. 9. That Daniel's 70 weeks refer specifically to events related to Israel is to be expected, since the prophecy was given to Daniel in response to his interceding for his nation with prayer and fasting. If non-mention does not exclude the "tribulation saints" or "*all them that dwell upon the earth,*" neither does it exclude the "Church."

**Problem #2** — Ice writes, "*Second, posttribulationism must deny the New Testament teaching of imminency – that Christ could come at any-moment. Pretribulationism does not have a*

*problem with these New Testament passages, since they believe that no signs must precede the rapture."*

We will devote the next article in this series proving that the Bible does NOT teach that the rapture is now imminent.

**Problem #3** — Ice writes, *"Third, premillennial posttribulationism has no answer to their problem of who will populate the millennium if the rapture and second coming occur at the same time. Since all believers will be translated at the rapture and all unbelievers judged, because no unrighteous shall be allowed to enter Christ's kingdom, then no one would be left in mortal bodies to start the population base for the millennium. The pretribulation viewpoint does not have a problem at this point."*

We most certainly do have an answer to this problem, a Biblical one to boot. For now, we need only mention one passage — Zech. 14:16-19 — which states plainly that there will be some heathen, who survive Armageddon, who will enter the Millennium in natural bodies. Who does Ice think Jesus will *"rule with a rod of iron?"* (Rev. 2:27, 12:5, & 19:15).

**Problem #4** — Ice writes, *"Fourth, posttribulationism is not able to explain the sheep and goats judgment after the second coming in Matthew 25:31-46. As in the previous problem, how would there be any believers in mortal bodies, if they were raptured at the second coming, who would be available to enter into Christ's kingdom? Pretribulationism does not have such a problem."*

This is the same as the above problem, and is resolved by the same passages. There are most definitely others besides the "sheep and goats." Several passages refer to these others. We will devote a separate article to this question.

**Problem #5** — Ice writes, *"Fifth, since Revelation 19:7-8 indicates that the church, Christ's Bride, is made ready to accompany Christ to earth (Rev. 19:14) before the second coming, how could this reasonably happen if part of the church is still on earth awaiting Christ's Advent? If the rapture of the church takes place at the second coming, then how does the Bride (i.e., the church) also come with Christ at His return? There would not be sufficient time for this to happen within a posttribulational sequence, but the pretribulation position has no such problem."*

The problem is really Ice's and pretribulationists. The text does not say the Bride has become **ready to descend to earth**. It says she has just made herself **ready for the wedding**. *"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has*

*come, and His wife has made herself ready.' And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev. 19:7-8). The Bride is not yet married to Christ in chapter 19. The above statement is made by the multitude in heaven in **anticipation** of the wedding, and the Groom leaving to fetch His bride. At the extreme end of the tribulation, the Bride has just become ready for the wedding, and the time has finally arrived for the wedding. In a posttribulation scheme, the final stages of the Bride's becoming "ready" is the last persecution of the overcomers in the tribulation. If the "Bridal" analogy is to follow Jewish custom, the Bride must "make herself ready" BEFORE the Groom comes to fetch her. Therefore, His coming to fetch the Bride should be AFTER Rev. 19:7-8 and not seven years before, as in Ice's scheme. Likewise, in the Jewish wedding, the marriage takes place immediately after the Bride has been fetched by the Groom and brought to their future home. In Ice's scenario, the Groom fetches the bride seven years before she is ready, takes her to heaven (but not their future home as in the custom), and He is intimate with her for seven years before the wedding! Then after seven years of living with His bride, she finally makes herself ready for the wedding! Only after living with her for seven years does He marry her, and then instantly leaves with her from heaven to go back to the house of the bride! Ice and other pretribulationists have made havoc of the Jewish wedding customs that are clearly intended in this passage! On the other hand, the posttribulation view is perfectly consistent with the Jewish wedding customs, assumes nothing, but takes only what is plainly stated in the text.*

### **Conclusion:**

Ice's concluding statement is as follows: *"The distinctions between Christ's coming in the air to rapture His church are too great to be reduced into a single coming at the end of the tribulation. These biblical distinctions provide a strong basis for the pretribulation rapture teaching."*

We will leave the reader to decide if Ice has demonstrated those insurmountable distinctions. If not, he has not met the burden of proof which is clearly the responsibility of pretribulationists. We all agree on a posttribulation coming, a gathering of living saints (Matt. 24:31), and a resurrection of dead saints (Dan. 12:1-2 & Rev. 20:4-5) at the posttribulation event. In order for the pretribulation view to postulate another coming prior to the tribulation, Ice needs to show either by explicit teaching or by implicit requirements that the rapture MUST BE prior to the second coming. And even if he could successfully do so, that would only rule out a posttribulation rapture. In order to rule out the mid-trib and pre-wrath views, he needs to also show why the rapture MUST BE before the 70th week. In my opinion, he has done none of these things. What he has shown, in my opinion, is that the pretribulation view is based on faulty



reasoning and fabricated evidence. It is certainly not the result of a consistent literal hermeneutic.

**Notes:**

1. Ice, Thomas, Pretribulation Perspectives Article, [THE RAPTURE AND THE SECOND COMING: AN IMPORTANT DISTINCTION](http://www.according2prophecy.org/rapsec.html). <http://www.according2prophecy.org/rapsec.html>