

Imminence

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Like John Walvoord before him, Thomas Ice sees "imminence" as one of the key pillars supporting pretribulationism. He claims that non-pretribulationists "sense" that imminence assures the pretribulation view, and this is the reason for our "fiercely attacking" this pretribulation pillar. Ice writes:

"The New Testament teaching that Christ could return and rapture His church at any-moment, without prior signs or warning (i.e., imminency), is such a powerful argument for pretribulationism that it is one of the most fiercely attacked doctrines by pre-trib opponents. Non-pretribulationists sense that if the New Testament teaches imminency, then a pre-trib rapture is virtually assured."¹

But, as we shall see, "imminence" (as defined by Ice and other pretribulationists) is not taught in Scripture, but actually refuted by Scripture. "Imminence" is a fabrication of modern pretribulationism. It is a completely inaccurate representation of the kind of expectancy taught in Scripture. What pretribulationists have actually done is constructed an obstacle to posttribulationism, and then forced that obstacle on the Scriptures.

Ice's "Imminence" Fails His Own Test

Ice begins by citing Dr. Renald Showers' definition of "imminence." But, Ice and Showers have set the bar so high in order to exclude the posttribulation rapture, that the "rapture" taught in the Bible cannot possibly meet their criterion. According to Ice, *"Other things may happen before the imminent event, but nothing else must take place before it happens. If something else must take place before an event can happen, then that event is not imminent. In other words, the necessity of something else taking place first destroys the concept of imminency."*

In this statement, Ice has set pretribulationism up for certain failure. By defining "imminence" in this way, just one prophesied event prior to the rapture will completely "destroy the concept of imminence" as a biblical doctrine, and therefore kick the legs out from under pretribulationism.

¹ Ice, Thomas, Perhaps Today: The Imminent Coming of Christ.
<http://www.according2prophecy.org/perhaps.html>

Jesus' Prediction of Peter's Death

The Bible indicates that certain things MUST take place before the rapture. One such prophesied event was the martyrdom of the Apostle Peter **in his old age**. All of Paul's Epistles that Ice later cites, which teach "imminence" according to him, were written while Peter was alive and well. Yet, Peter was told by Jesus that he would die a martyr's death in his old age (John 21:19). "...but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God." Both Peter and Paul were martyred around AD66, some thirty-three years after Jesus made this prediction. If Peter was a fairly young man, say in his mid thirties, when Jesus spoke this, putting him at around 70 years old when he was finally martyred. Peter, Paul, and the early Christians expected Peter to live to an old age, to die, and be resurrected later at the resurrection of believers. As long as Peter was still fairly young and alive the rapture could not possibly be "imminent" by Ice's standard. Therefore, Paul knew Jesus' coming was not "imminent" while he penned the very Epistles that Ice claims teach "imminence." And Paul's readers, who knew Peter, fully understood that the rapture was not imminent as long as Peter was still around. Even Peter's death could not be said to be imminent while he was still a fairly young man, or while he was a free man, because Jesus prophesied martyrdom for Peter in his old age. Therefore, Jesus' prophecy about Peter's death defies Ice's definition of "imminence," and plainly indicates that the early Church could not have held to the kind of "imminence" that Ice espouses throughout the first thirty-three years of its existence.

The Great Commission Rules Out "Imminence"

Jesus sent the Apostles out to preach the Gospel to all nations. He gave them specific instructions to wait in Jerusalem for the "power." He also was very explicit that they were to begin in Jerusalem, move on to Samaria, and then to the remote Gentile nations.

Acts 1:7-12

7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.

(KJV)

Notice that world evangelism was the task assigned to Jesus' Apostles. The power that came on Pentecost was clearly linked to their obeying the Great Commission. It was therefore the Apostles' job, once they received power on the day of Pentecost, to obey Jesus' Great Commission. As we read Acts, we see that the Church did indeed do exactly as Jesus said. They began preaching in Jerusalem (Acts 2-7). Then in Samaria (Acts 8-9). And then finally to the Gentiles (Acts 10ff).

If Ice's definition of imminence is correct, Jesus could have come back at "any moment" after Pentecost, before they ever preached in Samaria or to a single Gentile! Is that what the Apostles expected, knowing that Jesus had commanded them to preach to the Samaritans, and to all nations? Hardly! They expected to get with the program and do as Jesus commanded them. Jesus could not have returned until at least a large portion of the events in Acts had occurred. That is, at least several years after Pentecost. Therefore, the rapture could not be "imminent" for quite some time after the Church was established.

Paul's Refutation of Ice's "Imminence"

Paul also wrote an extensive refutation of "imminence" because some of the early Thessalonian believers had mistakenly assumed that Jesus' coming was imminent. In his first Epistle to the Thessalonians Paul indicated that Jesus' coming would not catch them by surprise, something that could not be said if Jesus' coming would be completely unannounced (as Ice's "imminence" requires).

1 Thess 5:1-4

1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

(KJV)

This passage teaches that the wicked will be caught by surprise by Jesus' coming, but believers will NOT be surprised by Jesus' coming. "As a thief" is an expression

borrowed from Jesus' Olivet Discourse, and indicates being caught totally by surprise. While Paul says plainly that it applies to the wicked, he also says that this does NOT apply to the "brethren." This is impossible in Ice's "imminence" (no warning) theory. Only by having some kind of idea when Jesus is coming can believers not be surprised "as a thief." And that warning comes in the form of the signs in Matt. 24.

Apparently, some of the Thessalonian believers did not understand this distinction, and were influenced by other sources indicating that Jesus' coming might be imminent. They were already enduring severe persecution, and Jesus' coming in the midst of persecution was indeed their "blessed hope." So, Paul wrote his second Epistle to correct this error.

In the first chapter, Paul unmistakably tied together their relief from persecution with the posttribulation coming of Jesus. In verse 7, Paul told them that their relief from persecution would come when Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His army of angels, to take vengeance on the ungodly. That is, their relief from persecution (not only the punishment of their persecutors) could be expected at the posttribulation revelation of Jesus Christ. That this relief was not imminent, but would be preceded by specific signs, was explained by Paul in the verses that follow.

II Thess 2:1-3

1 Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,

2 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 Christ is at hand.

3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

(KJV)

The first thing we should note is verse 1 plainly links the "coming" of the Lord with our "gathering" together to Him, and establishes the "rapture" as the subject of this passage. Contrary to some pre-trib writers, the "coming" and "gathering" in verse 1 are not separate or unrelated events. This is indicated by the Greek grammar.

concerning the coming the Lord our Jesus Christ and our gathering-together to Him

The nouns "coming" and "gathering-together" are separated by the word "and" (kai). The first noun (coming) has the definite article and the second noun "gathering-together" does not. In Greek grammar (Sharps first rule), this normally indicates unity

between impersonal nouns.² Only one event is in view here. Our "gathering together unto Him" is a part of Jesus' coming. The grammar Paul used associates our being gathered with that coming. If Paul wanted to indicate two separate comings or events, he would have also used the definite article before the second noun (according to Sharp's sixth rule), as follows.

concerning the coming the Lord our Jesus Christ and the gathering-together of-us to Him

The above grammatical structure would indicate two distinct events. Paul was writing about a single, compound event — the coming of Christ when we will be gathered together unto Him. The remaining sentences refer to this event — the rapture — which occurs at His coming.

Verse 2 implies that these believers were "shaken in mind" or "troubled," due to some outside influence, a false epistle claiming to have been from Paul, which indicated that the "Day of Christ" was "at hand." There is no doubt that Paul was identifying the "Day of Christ" with the "coming" and "gathering" in verse one, and that he still had the rapture in view.

Some modern translations read "has come" (past) rather than "is at hand" (is imminent). However, the Greek Scholar A. T. Robertson agreed with the KJV rendering. In his "Word Pictures" Robertson wrote the Greek word translated "at hand" in verse 2 means "is imminent." *"Perfect active indicative of enisthmi, old verb, to place in, but intransitive in this tense to stand in or at or near. So "is imminent" (Lightfoot). The verb is common in the papyri"* (bold & underline mine). That the perfect tense is used implies the Thessalonians thought that Christ's coming had just become "imminent," or was already standing near or in close proximity. John Gill, the Baptist Greek and Hebrew scholar, had this to say in his commentary on this passage. *"As that the day of Christ is at hand;*

² Granville Sharp's sixth rule reads as follows: "And as the insertion of the copulative kai between nouns of the same case, without articles, (according to the fifth rule,) denotes that the second noun expresses a different person, thing, or quality, from the preceding noun, so, likewise, the same effect attends the copulative when each of the nouns are preceded by articles, as in the following examples - (John 1:17, John 2:22, John 11:44, Col. 2:2, 2 Tim. 1:5, 1 Pet. 4:11)." [Remarks on the uses of the Definite Article in the Greek Text of the New Testament; Granville Sharp, 1778]

Note that Sharp's sixth rule applies to both personal and non-personal nouns. Some have argued that the first rule does not apply at all to non-personal nouns, and cannot be used to show unity. However, Daniel B. Wallace has done an exhaustive study of these constructions and concluded that at the lowest level, even with impersonal nouns, the article - substantive - kai - substantive "always indicates at least some sort of unity." [Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, p. 270]. Frequently the unity being expressed in such constructions with impersonal nouns indicates the later noun is a subset of the former. In this case, the "coming" of Christ is the larger event, with the "gathering together" of the elect being a component or subset of it.

or is at this instant just now coming on; as if it would be within that year, in some certain month, and on some certain day in it; which notion the apostle would have them by no means give into." It was this mistaken idea of "imminence" that Paul sought to correct in this passage.

How did Paul refute this false expectation of "imminence" (or perhaps "immediacy") by the Thessalonians? It was by claiming that certain known signs must occur before "*our gathering together unto Him*." Verse 2 contains Paul's explanation of the mistake (thinking that the rapture was "imminent" or "immediate"), and in verse 3 Paul corrected their mistake. That day (the "coming" of Christ and our "gathering" together unto Him — the "Day of Christ") cannot come until after two signs occur — the apostasy and the revelation of the Man of Sin. Paul then went on to explain how the Man of Sin will be revealed — sitting in the Temple claiming to be God. Both of these signs were major features of Jesus' Olivet Discourse in the same order (cf. Matt. 24:9-15), as events that must occur before His posttribulation coming. According to Paul, until the "apostasy" and the "Man of Sin" is revealed by sitting in the Temple of God, "*our gathering together unto Him*" cannot be imminent. Notice also that it is this very issue of a false sense of imminence that Paul warns, "*let no man deceive you by any means.*" I would suggest that the reader take Paul's advice.

Paul further explained the "apostasy" in other passages. He wrote of a future sharp increase in apostasy among the Church in "*the last days*," far beyond what they currently were experiencing (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1, 2 Tim. 3:1ff, 2 Tim. 4:3). Peter also wrote that scoffers would come "*in the last days saying, where is the promise of His coming*" (2 Pet. 3:3-4).

Therefore, we have definite prophecies by Jesus, Peter, and Paul that indicate certain things must occur before the rapture.

- Peter's growing old and becoming a martyr
- The Gospel being preached to the Samaritans and Gentiles
- The Apostasy in the last days
- The revelation of the Man of Sin
- Scoffers in the last days

According to Ice, "*If something else must take place before an event can happen, then that event is not imminent. In other words, the necessity of something else taking place first destroys the concept of imminency.*" Therefore, we may conclude, based on Ice's own criterion, that the rapture was not "imminent" while these things remained unfulfilled and while Paul's and Peter's Epistles were being written. If it was not imminent when the very

passages that Ice claims teach imminence were being written, those passages cannot teach "imminence," otherwise, they would not have been true when delivered to the first century Christians, when the above things were still unfulfilled.

James' Parable of the Farmer

James 5:7-8

7 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.
(KJV)

James used a parable of a farmer to illustrate how believers should await the coming of Christ. He pointed out that the farmer patiently awaits the time of harvest. He recommended that believers take the same approach as the farmer, patiently waiting for the coming of Christ. Is this an illustration of an "any moment" coming with no prior signs? Does a farmer expect the harvest "at any moment" during the entire year after planting? A farmer knows that there is an appointed time for the harvest, after the crop has matured. He patiently **awaits** the rainy season before harvest. In Israel, there were two main rainy seasons. The harvests followed these rainy seasons. Farmers never harvested their fields until after the rains. The **rainy seasons** in this parable are equivalent to the signs that must come prior to Christ's "harvest." While the coming of the Lord is drawing near (fast approaching), it is not "imminent" in the sense that nothing needs to occur first. If there are signs (rains) prior to the harvest for the farmer in James' parable, so too are there signs prior to Jesus' coming, before it can be considered "imminent." If the farmer knows that the harvest is not "imminent" during the growing stage, James expected his readers to realize that Jesus' coming would be delayed for a season as well. In fact, the whole point of this parable was to exhort them toward patience, because the Lord's coming was still some distance away.

Imminency in the New Testament - According to Ice

According to Ice, any New Testament passage that speaks of Christians **waiting for or watching for** Jesus' coming necessarily implies "imminence." In fact, this is the whole substance of Ice's entire "imminence" argument. Ice writes: *"Those verses stating that Christ could return at any moment, without warning and those instructing believers to wait and look for the Lord's coming teach the doctrine of imminence."*

First of all, we should dispense with the notion that any passage indicates Christ might come "without warning," because no passage makes such a claim. That is something Ice

is forcing into the Scriptures. There are a variety of passages that speak of believers waiting and watching for Christ's coming. The question is, does "waiting" or "watching" imply that it could occur at any moment? Here are the passages that Ice claims teach "imminence" (as he has defined it) and his comments.

"1 Corinthians 1:7- 'awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,'

1 Corinthians 16:22- 'Maranatha.'

Philippians 3:20- 'For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;'

Philippians 4:5- 'The Lord is near.'

1 Thessalonians 1:10- 'to wait for His Son from heaven,'

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18- 'For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of {the} archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.'

1 Thessalonians 5:6- 'so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.'

1 Timothy 6:14- 'that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,'

Titus 2:13- 'looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus;'

Hebrews 9:28- 'so Christ . . . shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.'

James 5:7-9- 'Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. . . . for the coming of the Lord is at hand. . . . behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.'

1 Peter 1:13 - 'fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.'

Jude 21- 'waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.'

Revelation 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20-''I am coming quickly!''

Revelation 22:17, 20- 'And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' 'He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.' "

Look carefully at the above passages. Where do any of these passages claim or imply that no signs can precede Jesus' coming? Ice's entire premise is that one cannot wait or watch for an event unless it can occur "at any moment." That is simply a false premise. Ice writes; *"It is significant that all of the above passages relate to the rapture and speak of the Lord's coming as something that could occur at any-moment, that it is imminent. This is why believers are waiting for a person-Jesus Christ-not an event or series of events such as those related to the tribulation leading up to Christ's second advent in which He returns to the earth and remains for His millennial reign."* Let's test Ice's logic here to see if it agrees with Scripture.

"Watching" Defined by Jesus

Jesus' posttribulation coming is clearly spoken of in precisely the same way, with instructions for "watching." In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus gave a whole series of signs that will precede and announce His coming *"immediately after the tribulation."* Yet, Jesus told His followers to WATCH for this coming!

Mark 13

14 But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judaea flee to the mountains: ...

19 For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be. ...

24 But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light,

25 And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken.

26 And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.

27 And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven. ...

*33 Take ye heed, **watch and pray**: for ye know not when the time is.*

34 *For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.*

35 *Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning:*

36 *Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.*

37 *And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.*
(KJV)

Since the context plainly indicates that Jesus commanded His followers to WATCH for His posttribulation coming, which will be announced by a host of signs, how can statements about "watching" or "waiting" in the Epistles imply that NO SIGNS can occur before Jesus comes? Should we not rather interpret the biblical kind of "watching" and "waiting" for Jesus' coming based on biblical precedent, rather than on some imaginary concept of "imminence" proclaimed by pretribulationists?

Imminence and Pretribulationism

Ice's conclusion is that the Scriptures he listed prove pretribulationism because they prove "imminence" which is compatible only with pretribulationism. He writes; *"As we consider the above passages, we note that Christ may come at any moment, that the rapture is actually imminent. Only pretribulationism can give a full, literal meaning to such an any-moment event."* Yet, the passages Ice cites could just as easily indicate that Christians were doing exactly what Jesus said in Mark 13, watching for His posttribulation coming *"immediately after the tribulation."* If "watching" does not require Ice's kind of "imminence" in Mark 13 or Matt. 24, neither does "watching" require "imminence" in the Epistles. This is particularly so because the readers of Paul's Epistles were no doubt familiar with the discourse of Christ.

Pretribulationists have difficulty imagining how one can "watch" and "wait" for an event that will be preceded by prior signs. But, not only did Jesus command His followers to "watch" for an event that would be preceded by signs, but He also gave the perfect illustration in the same discourse. Jesus referred to some of the signs that must occur first as *"the beginning of birth pains"* (Matt. 24:8 & Mark 13:8). He spoke of the events that follow the abomination of desolation as *"great travail"* (Matt. 24:21/Mark 13:19). The imagery Jesus used for His coming, and the brief period of tribulation prior to it, was a pregnant woman giving birth. The pains of labor and childbirth are certainly not pleasant. A woman does not look forward to or "wait" for the time of labor. But, she most certainly awaits and looks for the birth of her child with eager anticipation! Is she aware that the birth will come after a short period of travail? Of course! But, she looks beyond the labor pains to the moment when she can hold her child in her arms.

"Watching" and "waiting" for Christ's return in Scripture has to do with anticipation and placing our HOPE in Jesus' coming, not merely a sequence of events. Paul wrote, *"But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it"* (Rom. 8:25). The focus of our HOPE and our JOY is Jesus' coming, regardless of whether there are prior signs or not. We WATCH for the thing in which we place our HOPE. This is how Jesus described His coming. And it is how the early Christians "watched" and "waited" for Jesus' coming as their HOPE of deliverance. Unless we define "watching" and "waiting" for Christ's coming as Jesus did, we can easily be misled by such seemingly logical (but anti-biblical) arguments.

Ice claims that *"other rapture views must redefine imminence more loosely than the New Testament would allow. Dr. Walvoord declares, 'The exhortation to look for 'the glorious appearing' of Christ to His own (Titus 2:13) loses its significance if the Tribulation must intervene first. Believers in that case should look for signs.'"* But, Walvoord's and Ice's "imminence" is not what the Bible teaches, as we have proven from Jesus' own words about WATCHING for His coming. Since Jesus gave a series of signs, He clearly taught that WATCHING for His coming includes paying attention to the signs He gave that will immediately precede His coming. As a woman eagerly watches for, and awaits the day she will give birth, yet is keenly aware of the signs that will precede it, so to must we await and anticipate the coming of Christ, while being aware of the signs Jesus gave us.

Jesus taught that His coming would BECOME imminent at some point in the future, but that it was NOT imminent at that time. When would it become "imminent?" Only after the signs He predicted come to pass. After giving the series of signs and describing His coming afterwards, Jesus said this:

Matt 24:32-33

32 Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh:

33 So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.

(KJV)

Jesus used a fig tree to illustrate the relationship of signs to "imminence." The disciples could tell when summer was "imminent" by watching for the signs of the fig trees sprouting leaves. In the same manner as the disciples observed the fig tree as a sign of summer, Jesus said they should know when His coming is "imminent," or *"near, even at the doors."* It will be imminent after the signs come to pass. Within this context Jesus went on to instruct them to WATCH for His coming. Therefore, the New Testament

concept of WATCHING and WAITING for Jesus' return places the focus on our hope (His actual coming), while at the same time including the expectation that the signs will signal His coming, indicating when it becomes "imminent." Only after we see all these things come to pass is Jesus' coming "*near, even at the doors.*"

No "Blessed Hope" without Imminence?

Ice attempts to denounce the posttribulation hope of a rapture as no hope at all. Ice writes, "*The New Testament exhortation to be comforted by the Lord's coming (John 14:1; 1 Thess. 4:18) would no longer have meaning if believers first had to pass through any part of the tribulation. Instead, comfort would have to await passage through the events of the tribulation. No, the church has been given a "Blessed Hope," in part, because our Lord's return is truly imminent.*"

I for one would like to hear Thomas Ice explain to an expectant mother that her "hope" of holding her child in her arms is no hope at all because she must first experience labor. Another major problem with this argument is that the Church was already experiencing great persecution when these Scriptures were written. Ice is writing from a Western mindset, where the ease of living for Christians is an anomaly, not consistent with the history of true Christianity. Our modern lifestyle is NOT the normal Christian experience according to Jesus. He said that "*in the world you will have tribulation*" (John 16:33). Paul told the churches that "*we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God*" (Acts 14:22). The Thessalonian believers were comforted in their tribulation by Paul's encouragement that they would rest from their troubles "*when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire*" (2 Thess. 1:4-10). One of the reasons Jesus' coming was the "blessed hope" was because He would rescue believers out from among severe persecution and trouble. Going through the events of Matt. 24 was not a foreign concept to the early Church (as it is to Ice and most Western Christians). They were already suffering intense persecution and martyrdom. Tribulation may seem foreign to western Christians because we live in relative ease and comfort. By comparison, going through the tribulation is repulsive. But, not so for the early Church. Therefore, the problem Ice raises here for the posttribulation view is really a reflection of our peculiar western culture and ease of lifestyle. Christians living in China today, or in other places where Christians are persecuted, would not buy Ice's argument for one second. In fact, a good case can be made **that the more difficult the situation, the more "blessed" the "blessed hope" becomes.** The term "blessed hope" was not coined in the midst of a bunch of stylishly dressed Christians sitting on padded pews in an air conditioned mega-church, singing "praise and worship" songs. It was coined during Paul's imprisonment, and amidst the intense suffering of the early Church. Perhaps we would be closer to the truth if we say that the more comfortably we live now, the less "blessed" the hope of Jesus' coming becomes. The more tribulation we

endure, the more "blessed" that hope becomes. I assure you, the "blessed hope" is far more "blessed" for Christians in Chinese prisons than for Americans seated on padded pews. If we are going to stick to the grammatical historical interpretation of Scripture, we must interpret these kinds of statements in their historical setting of great persecution for the Church, and not from our modern western mindset.

Maranatha!

Lastly, Ice claims the word "maranatha" implies imminence. He writes, *"The early church had a special greeting for one another, as recorded in 1 Corinthians 16:22, which was 'Maranatha!' Maranatha consists of three Aramaic words: 'Mar' ('Lord'), 'ana' ('our'), and 'tha' ('come'), meaning 'our Lord, come.' As with other New Testament passages, Maranatha only makes sense if an any-moment or imminent coming is understood. Such an understanding supports the pre-trib position."*

As with Ice's other statements, it is his false assumption that "watching" or "waiting" for Jesus' coming requires his brand of "imminence" that is the problem. He has ignored the precedent in the Olivet Discourse, where Jesus fully explained "watching," and has substituted an artificial criterion nowhere taught in Scripture. His whole argument is defective because his claim that the Bible teaches an "any moment" coming is not true. His faulty claim that "watching" and "waiting" require his "any moment, no prior warning" kind of anticipation, skews not only the Scriptures, but also his interpretation of the writings of the Early Church Fathers. (Ice and other pretribulationists claim some of the early Christian writers believed in "imminence" because they too spoke of "watching" and "waiting.") Ice is forcing an UNBIBLICAL kind of "imminence" into "watching" and "waiting," which distorts both the New Testament as well as the Early Church writings. Not only does the New Testament (the Olivet Discourse in particular) refute Ice's "imminence," but so do the writings of the Early Church Fathers. They also spoke of "watching" yet at the same time clearly wrote that certain events MUST occur first. Rather than Ice defining what "watching" and "waiting" mean from the precedent set by Jesus, he forces his own fabricated meaning into the text, and then tells you that the rapture MUST be pretribulational because "watching" means "any moment," and "any moment" only works in a pretribulation scenario! He does the same with the early Church writings. He finds a few passages where they spoke of watching for Christ's return, and insists that this means they thought Jesus could come at "any moment." He ignores the same writers' plain statements that clearly indicate they expected many things to occur first. For example, the Roman Empire must fall, the ten kings must rise to power, the Church must be persecuted by the Antichrist, the Jewish Temple must be rebuilt with the Antichrist defiling it, etc. And how do pretribulationists reconcile both kinds of statements in the writings of the early Church? Could it be that perhaps the early writers understood "waiting" and "watching" as Jesus explained in His Olivet

Discourse? No. Instead, these pretribulation writers indicate that the early Christians were just too stupid to realize that Jesus' coming could not be "imminent" when it would be preceded by signs!

What Ice and other pretribulationists have done is constructed reverse engineered an argument "imminence." His definition of "imminence" is NOT derived from Scripture itself, but is custom tailored to fit the pretribulation view and exclude all other rapture views. Then it is forced on the Scriptures. Ice proclaims his "imminence" to be a biblical doctrine, and tries to prove the pretribulation rapture by injecting his definition of "imminence" into several passages that speak of "watching" for Christ's coming. My challenge to Dr. Ice is to explain how Jesus could instruct His followers to be watching for His posttribulation coming immediately after telling them a series of signs that will precede it.

In contrast, the posttribulation view establishes what "watching" really means from Scripture first (from Jesus teaching in the Olivet Discourse). And then interprets the rest of the Scriptures that refer to "watching" based on this foundational understanding. And amazingly enough, this is also in perfect alignment with what the early Christians wrote as well.

Maranatha!