



## **2 Thessalonians 2:1-8: Does it Support a Pre-wrath View?**

**By Eric Douma**

### **A STATEMENT ABOUT CONTEXT**

Before I begin presenting my position, I want to extend a word of gratitude to my pre-wrath friends, Alan Kurschner and Ryan Habbena. Although this paper is a critique of their eschatological position, I consider these men to be brothers in Christ with whom I share similar views in 99.9% of our theology.

Furthermore, since I regard the issue of the timing of the rapture to be a peripheral one (an important issue to be sure, but not one to break fellowship over), I want those on the pre-wrath side to understand the spirit of this critique. In times past, I was quite smitten with the pre-wrath position, especially the evidence I believed 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8 gave to their position. The more I have studied, however, the more I have come to see problems with this position. I hope my pre-wrath friends see this critique as a way of “pushing the ball down the field” in the attempt to help us all move closer to the truth the Scriptures teach. I fully expect a robust response, and welcome the refutation of any of my points if they do not represent truly what the Scriptures proclaim. It is to these men and in this spirit I dedicate my paper. Soli Deo gloria!

### **OBJECTIVE AND APPROACH**

Many scholars from differing eschatological camps have used 2 Thessalonians 2 as a proof text for their particular brand of end time events. In this paper, I will demonstrate that the exegetical issues involved in 2 Thessalonians 2 make it clear that this text cannot be used, in itself, to prove the pre-wrath position. Also, I will prove that the biblical interpreter must go beyond this text to the greater context of Scripture in order to resolve serious issues involving the timing of the rapture.

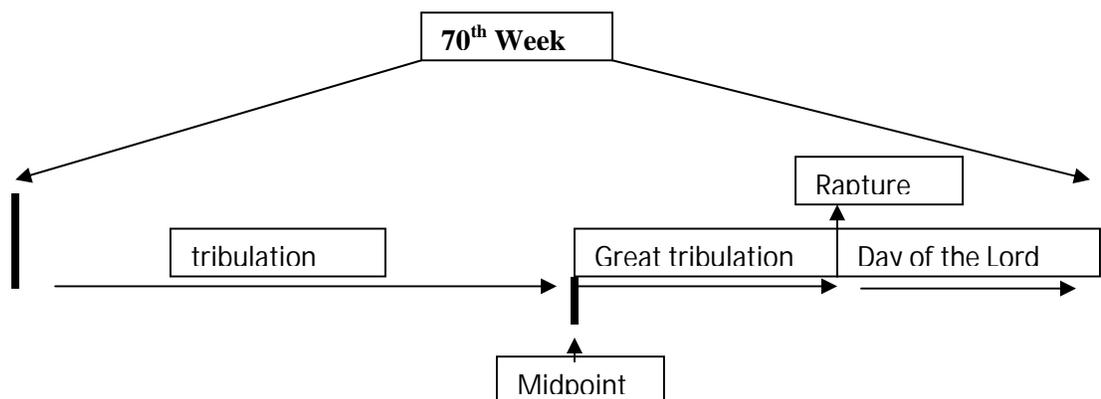
Another aim of this paper is to demonstrate that the pre-wrath position is not the “air tight” position its advocates are claiming. Serious exegetical and logical difficulties should make pre-wrath proponents wary of being too parochial concerning other views. Pre-wrath advocates have elevated the importance of the timing of the rapture by claiming that pre-tribulation advocates are less prepared to undergo persecution than are our pre-wrath brothers. Alan Kurschner, after citing Revelation 14:9-11, writes:

Question: who will be more prepared for this test? the person who is taught that this test will be applied to the Church and thus must have faith to endure; or, the person who is taught that the Church will be swept away in bed's of ease before the Antichrist uses the mark as a test of loyalty?<sup>1</sup>

Not only is this an obvious straw man argument, but it needlessly makes the doctrine of the timing of the rapture essential to a person's salvation! Make no mistake about it, Revelation 14:9-11 teaches that all who receive the mark of the beast will suffer eternal damnation. Kurschner has now elevated the stakes of the rapture debate to the extent that if you hold to the pre-tribulation position – you may lose your salvation. The high plausibility of the other rapture viewpoints should temper this attitude.

### **ANTICHRIST REVEALED**

A relatively new school on the position of the rapture called “pre-wrath” teaches that Jesus will not rapture the church prior to the tribulation period (beginning of 70<sup>th</sup> week) or before the great tribulation (last 3 ½ years). Pre-wrath advocates believe that the rapture of the church will occur sometime during the last 3 ½ years of the 70<sup>th</sup> week, but before “the day of the Lord.” Pre-wrath teaches that “the day of the Lord” is distinct from the tribulation and great tribulation periods, and that God's wrath is not poured out upon the world until the “day of the Lord.” Below is a pictorial representation of their view:



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<sup>1</sup> Alan Kurschner, “Someone’s Eschatology Does Not Affect Their Soul – Or So They Say,” n.p. [cited 3 October 2009]. Online: [http://www.prewrathrapture.com/2009/10/someones\\_eschatology\\_does\\_not\\_affect\\_the.php](http://www.prewrathrapture.com/2009/10/someones_eschatology_does_not_affect_the.php)

2 Thessalonians 2:1-8 is integral to pre-wrath's position because they believe this passage proves that Jesus cannot rapture the church until the Antichrist has exalted himself in the future rebuilt temple. Alan Kurschner states in an article entitled, It's The Antichrist Stupid:

How someone reads the following passage and concludes that the rapture occurs before the revelation of Antichrist is a lesson in how Tradition prevents many believers from seeing the Truth.

"(1) Now regarding the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to be with him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, (2) not to be easily shaken from your composure or disturbed by any kind of spirit or message or letter allegedly from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. (3) Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not arrive until the rebellion comes and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction. (4) He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, and as a result he takes his seat in God's temple, displaying himself as God. (5) Surely you recall that I used to tell you these things while I was still with you." (2 Thess 2:1-5).<sup>2</sup>

Kurschner is claiming 2 Thessalonians 2:4 proves that Antichrist exalts himself in the temple prior to the rapture because he understands the revealing of Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 as occurring at the midpoint of the 70<sup>th</sup> week. He also believes that the revelation of the Antichrist is synonymous with his being seated in the temple of God. This would eliminate the possibility of the rapture occurring prior to the midpoint of the 70<sup>th</sup> week and therefore eliminate the possibility of a pre-tribulation rapture. I will now prove that this is not necessarily the case for the following 8 reasons:

1. Paul does not teach that the rapture can't happen until Antichrist is revealed; rather, he teaches that the "day of the Lord" cannot be present because the Antichrist has yet to be revealed. Both pre-tribulation and pre-wrath proponents see "the day of the Lord" as occurring immediately after the rapture. These verses provide no answer to the question of when the rapture occurs, they merely prove to the Thessalonians that they were not living in "the day of the Lord," and therefore could not have missed the rapture.
2. Paul does not teach that the Antichrist is revealed at the time he sets himself in the temple, but at the time the restrainer is removed (verses 7- 8). I will prove that verse 4 should be seen as appositional in that it further clarifies who the Antichrist is, not when he comes.

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Kurschner, "It's the Antichrist Stupid," n.p. [cited 25 November 2009]. Online: [http://www.prewrathrapture.com/2009/11/its\\_the\\_antichriststupid.php](http://www.prewrathrapture.com/2009/11/its_the_antichriststupid.php)

3. The parousia is not a “coming with continued presence” as pre-wrath scholars claim. In fact, pre-wrath scholars must maintain a twofold or composite parousia just like pre-tribulation scholars.
4. It is logically inconsistent to argue for one parousia, while maintaining a 3 and ½ year reign of Antichrist mentioned in Revelation 13:5.
5. The pre-wrath position that Revelation 7:14 and Matthew 24:29-31 both teach the rapture is a contradiction.
6. It cannot be proven that God’s wrath is not present during either the tribulation or the great tribulation period of the 70<sup>th</sup> week. In fact, a good case can be made that God’s wrath is present during the entire tribulation period.
7. It is a logical fallacy to claim that the great tribulation is shortened to less than 3 and ½ years.
8. The day of the Lord does not begin during the last 3 and ½ year period, but at the beginning of the 70<sup>th</sup> week.

The context surrounding 2 Thessalonians 2 demonstrates that the Christians at Thessalonica were undergoing severe affliction and suffering (cf. 2nd Thessalonians 1:5-6). These Christians were apparently being taught that they were already living in “the day of the Lord” (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:2-3) because of the severe mistreatment they were already enduring. Whether the teachers were deliberately distorting Scripture for their own gain or were simply misguided is unknown. We can ascertain that Paul was so concerned for the well being of the saints at Thessalonica that he addressed this issue. This is important for our proper understanding of the passage, because the issue that Paul was refuting was the possibility that “the day of the Lord” had begun. In other words, Paul’s refutation is not pointed at the rapture directly; rather, he is proving to those at Thessalonica that they could not possibly be in the “day of the Lord.” The fear of being in “the day of the Lord” would be legitimate because the afflictions the Thessalonians were undergoing seemed so severe that they must have reasoned they were undergoing this unprecedented time of suffering.

Paul quenched the Thessalonians’ fear by writing, “Let no one in any way deceive you, for **it** will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and then the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction...” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). The “it” that I bolded does not exist in the Greek text. We must assume that the reference to what “...will not come unless...” is the day of the Lord from the preceding verse.<sup>3</sup> Remember, in both pre-wrath and pre-tribulation camps, “the day of the Lord” happens immediately after the rapture, and therefore the only advantage this passage can give the pre-wrath

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<sup>3</sup> The phrase “will not come...” also does not occur in the Greek text, but can be assumed based on the context of the conditional language.



Thess. 5:3; 2<sup>nd</sup> Thess. 2:8), εν (when, cf. Acts 2:1), or ως, οτε, οταν (when, cf. 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 11:34; Rom. 15:28; Rom. 11:27 respectively). In fact, Paul does use εως in verse 7 and και τοτε in verse 8 to indicate the timing of when Antichrist is revealed: "...he who now restrains will do so **until** he is taken out of the way. **Then** that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming..." (2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2:7b-8). This demonstrates that the timing of the revelation of Antichrist is found in verses 7-8, not verse 4. The question of when Antichrist is revealed is tied to when the restrainer is taken away, not necessarily Antichrist's placement in the temple.

### **THE RESTRAINER**

Who or what the restrainer is and when he is taken away becomes an important issue in the debate regarding the timing of the rapture. Paul's lack of specificity regarding who the restrainer is has left room for many throughout church history to speculate as to his identity. Here are some of the common views held regarding the restrainer: (1) The Roman Empire. (2) Human government in general. (3) God Himself. (3) Paul's proclamation of the gospel. (4) The Holy Spirit. (5) Michael the archangel. Recently, pre-wrath proponents have put forward the argument that the restrainer is Michael the archangel. Colin Nicholl has presented powerful arguments for the fact that Michael was seen as restraining/fighting on behalf of Israel.<sup>5</sup> The problem with the pre-wrath position in viewing Michael as the restrainer comes not from good evidence that he could be an excellent candidate, but from their insistence that Daniel 12:1 pictures Michael as "stepping aside" and allowing Antichrist to be revealed at the midpoint of the 70<sup>th</sup> week. I will now show that Colin Nicholl's position that Michael the archangel is "stepping aside" in Daniel 12:1 is not very plausible.

Colin Nicholl presents a powerful case that Michael the archangel is pictured in the biblical, apocryphal, and pseudopigraphical writings as being involved with the protection of Israel.<sup>6</sup> He does not, however, convincingly prove that Daniel 12:1 portrays Michael the archangel as ceasing to protect Israel so that the Antichrist is revealed at the midpoint of the tribulation. On the contrary, Daniel 12:1 demonstrates that Michael is "standing up" to fight for Israel, not "passing away" as Nicholl maintains.

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<sup>5</sup> Colin Nicholl, "Michael, the Restraint Removed 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2:6-7," JTS 51 (April, 2000), pp.26-53.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholl, Restraint Removed, 33- 34.

Colin Nicholl's case centers on a possible reading of the LXX which would indicate that Michael is not standing to fight for Israel, but standing aside to allow Israel to be attacked. The Masoretic Text renders Daniel 12:1a this way:

“]me ynB-le dmeh lwdNh rCh lakym dmey ayhh tebw”

“And at that time Michael, the great prince who stands over the sons of your people, **will arise.**”

The debate centers on the bolded verb *dmey*. This qal imperfect verb literally means “will stand,” “will arise,” or “will defend.”<sup>7</sup> Nicholl contends that the Septuagint's verb *παρελευσεται* should be the favored reading. This verb means “to pass away” or to “go by.” This, of course, would imply that Michael is being removed from his function as protector of Israel. Nicholl grants that the Theodotion version of the LXX uses *αναστησεται* which backs up the MT meaning “to arise,” but argues that the *παρελευσεται* “pass away” is the better reading because of a haggadic interpretation in the Midrash called Ruth Rabbah.<sup>8</sup> In Ruth Rabbah, two rabbis are cited as teaching that Michael will cease from protecting Israel. Ironically, these citations actually help prove that the MT reading is correct! “At that moment the angelic defender of Israel (Michael) remains silent. That is the meaning of the verse, ‘...at that time shall Michael stand up (*dmey*) (Daniel 12:1).’”<sup>9</sup> Nicholl cites this passage as proof that rabbis from 240-270 AD interpreted “standing up” as “passing away,” but this same text also proves that these rabbis believed that *dmey* was the correct reading! Nicholl can try to prove these rabbis had insights into Daniel 12:1, but he cannot claim that their interpretation is somehow infallible. I will now prove that *dmey* “stand” is the correct reading (which is synonymous with *αναστησεται* in Theodotion's LXX) by proving the following points:

1. The context of Daniel and the rest of Scripture clearly support the notion that Michael is “standing” to fight for Israel.
2. Ruth Rabbah actually supports *dmey* to be the original reading of the text (see above), and this term unequivocally indicates Michael is fighting for Israel rather than stepping aside.

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<sup>7</sup> Gesenius Hebrew –Chaldee Lexicon, Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, Ed., 1959, 637.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholl, *Restraint Removed*, 46-47.

<sup>9</sup> Nicholl, *Restraint Removed*, 46.

3. Colin Nicholl admits that the LXX was grappling with *dme* not *rbey*. This is an important admission because it allows the interpreter to focus on the meaning of *dme*. If context proves that *dme* means “to stand” rather than “to step aside,” then it does not matter whose interpretation differs.

The immediate context in Daniel 12:1 demonstrates that God’s elect in Israel will be delivered by the actions of Michael the archangel: “...and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be delivered” (Daniel 12:1c). This clause is syntactically linked to the first clause of 12:1 by the timing indicator, *ayhh teb* “and at that time...” One could say that at the same time Michael stood up – God’s people were delivered!<sup>10</sup> The deliverance of God’s people “at that time” fits much better with an archangel who fights on their behalf than an archangel who steps out of the way as Nicholl maintains.

A further problem arises if one maintains that *dme* means “step aside” rather than to “stand up to fight.” Daniel 11:3 uses *dme* to denote the “standing up” of Alexander the Great which certainly implies his rise to power with great military prowess. In fact, the *qal* imperfect form of the verb *dme* is used 6 times in Daniel 11 and it never means “stand aside.” Below is a list of the 6 usages in Daniel 11 of *dme* in the *qal* imperfect:

1. Daniel 11:8c “...and he on his part will **refrain from** attacking the king of the North for some years.” (Note: This passage relates to how Ptolemy III restrained from attacking Syria after his treaty with Seleucus II.) At first glance “refrain” may seem to prove Nicholl’s point that *dme* could depict Michael as “refraining” from protecting Israel. This is not the case for a very simple reason. The verb *dme* in this passage is immediately followed by the Hebrew noun for king (מלך) that has a prefixed preposition attached to it meaning “from.” This gives a literal translation of “standing from.” It is important to note that in Daniel 12:1 there is no prefixed preposition on a word that follows *dme* to indicate that Michael is standing “from.” Michael is just plain standing!
2. Daniel 11:14 “Now in those times many will **rise up** against the king of the South, the violent ones among your people will also lift themselves up in order to fulfill the vision, but they will fall down.”

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<sup>10</sup> Note: “And at that time”, *ayhh teb* occurs twice in verse one. It occurs in the beginning of 12:1a, and in the beginning of 12:1c. This is a tremendous clue which tells us that Michael’s “arising” and Israel’s rescue happen at the same time.

3. Daniel 11:15 “Then the king of the North will come, cast up a siege ramp and capture a well fortified city; and the forces of the South **will not stand** their ground, not even their choicest troops, for there will be no strength **to make a stand.**” (Note: “to make a stand” is in the infinitive construct.)

4. Daniel 11:17 “He will set his face to come with the power of his whole kingdom, bringing with him a proposal of peace which he will put into effect; he will also give him the daughter of women to ruin it. But she will **not take a stand** for him or be on his side.”

5. Daniel 11:25 “He will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South with a large army; so the king of the South will mobilize an extremely large and mighty army for war; but he **will not stand**, for schemes will be devised against him.

Note: In all of the negative cases (like “will not stand”) – they are negative not because of the verb, but because *al* came prior to the verb for negation.

6. Daniel 11:34 “Forces from him **will arise**, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation.”

Not only do each of these passages demonstrate that *dme* means “to stand,” “to arise” or to “oppose,” but the *qal* perfect form is also found in Daniel 11:3, 7, 20, 21 and in each of these verses *dme* means “arise to power.” After viewing the data of how *dme* is used in Daniel 11, it is difficult to see why Daniel would use the identical verb with the completely opposite meaning in Daniel 12:1! Clearly, the immediate context of Daniel supports the notion that Michael is standing to fight for Israel.

Revelation 12 also portrays Michael as fighting against Satan and his forces. There is not one reference to Michael stopping and “standing aside” to allow Satan and his minions to have their way with Israel. Revelation 12:7-8 states, “And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven.” Two points need to be made regarding this text: 1. If the timing of this battle represents the original fall of Satan and the demons, then Michael is pictured in this text as fighting and never stopping. 2. If the timing occurs at the midpoint of the tribulation (which is likely since verse 6 mentions 1,260 days - or the last 3 1/2 years), then Michael is pictured as fighting at this point in redemptive history which would further validate the “standing to fight” notion of *dmey* in Daniel 12:1.

Nicholl also admits that *dmey* was probably the original reading of the Masoretic Text: “Nevertheless, for the reasons that we have adduced above, we regard it as preferable to understand the

LXX's παρελευσεται as a translation of dmey rather than rbey"<sup>11</sup> This admission combined with the proof above regarding the usage of dmey in Daniel 11 should be sufficient to prove that Daniel 12:1 is teaching that Michael is standing to fight – not standing back to allow Israel to be attacked. There is, however, a possibility that even παρελευσεται itself could be rendered in such a way that it indicates the “appearing on the scene” by an angelic being. The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament understands this to be the meaning of the term when applied to Daniel 12:1 in the LXX. Nicholl brushes this aside by claiming that it is invalid to derive the meaning of a verb by one single usage in the LXX, but it is possible that the emphasis on παρελευσεται in passages containing theophanies such as Genesis 32:32 and Exodus 33:19 isn't the act of “passing by” but the “appearing” of God's backside.<sup>12</sup>

In summary of our discussion regarding the restrainer, it is very unlikely that Michael can be depicted as stopping his restraining role at the midpoint of the 70<sup>th</sup> week. Nicholl does, however, raise compelling evidence that Michael could be either “the restrainer” or at least involved in the process. It is here that I offer a possible solution.

### **POSSIBLE SOLUTION**

Any attempt in suggesting who or what the restrainer is has to wrestle with the fact that 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 uses both the neuter participle κατεχον (vs. 6) and the masculine participle κατεχων (vs. 7). Nicholl helps us in that he gives good evidence for the fact that Michael is depicted in the Scriptures as having a restraining function (cf. Daniel 10:13, 20-21; Revelation 12:7). What Nicholl sets aside too quickly, however, is the relationship between Michael and the function of human government. It seems possible to me that Michael could be functioning as an angelic agent who protects God's people by various means including the prevention of the one world government over which the Antichrist will one day rule. This would then take into account why both the neuter and masculine participles are used in 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2:6-7. Furthermore, Paul may have had good reason to speak enigmatically about government because the Romans certainly would have viewed any such talk as an attempt to usurp their power.

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<sup>11</sup> Nicholl, *Restraint Removed*, 45.

<sup>12</sup> J. Schneider, 'parercomai,' TDNT, vol. 2, pp.681-682. Note: The emphasis in texts such as Genesis 32:32 LXX and Daniel 12:1 is the appearing of God or the angels. The focal point of Genesis 32:32 is not the fact that God “passed by,” but the fact that He “appeared” to Jacob, yet he lived: “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved” (Genesis 32:30).

Evidence for this position is bolstered by the fact that Michael is depicted as fighting against angels (demons) who rule over the nations such as Persia and Greece ( cf. Daniel 10:13, 20). Revelation 13:1 depicts the Beast as a composite of all the previous governments with its 7 heads (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and then Antichrist's government). These facts speak to the importance of God graciously establishing numerous human governments after the attempt by man to build a one world government in Genesis 11. After all, the Antichrist's power stems not only from Satan giving him power (Revelation 13:2), but also from the whole world giving him allegiance (Revelation 13:3-4).

To keep humanity from establishing a one world government in Genesis 11, God intervened. "Come let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city" (Genesis 11:7-8). The "table of nations" that came together to build a great name for themselves were allotted under the fallen angels according to Deuteronomy 32:8.<sup>13</sup> These are the very angels that Michael is fighting against in Daniel 10:13, 20! It is also important to note that the city of man that God stopped from being built in Genesis 11 will be built when all governmental authority has been given to the Beast (Revelation 18:2,10, 21). Isaiah 9:6 says that all government will one day rest solely on Jesus' shoulders. Should it surprise us then that Antichrist will one day attempt to usurp this by receiving, for a time, a monopoly on all human government?

I propose, then, that the restrainer in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 is combination of Michael the archangel and human governmental rule. The fallen angels, who rule the nations, will be allowed, for a time, to gather a one world government under Antichrist's authority. Interestingly, the beginning of the tribulation depicts the Antichrist riding on a white horse – conquering the nations (Revelation 6:2), and therefore bringing to fruition his one world government. If it is true that Michael is engaged in restraining this very activity, then one must conclude that the restrainer is taken away at the beginning of the tribulation period – not the middle.

### **ANTICHRIST'S DESTRUCTION AND THE PAROUSIA**

Another problem that arises for the pre-wrath proponent is the timing of the Antichrist's destruction and their understanding of parousia. Paul makes it very clear that Antichrist will be slain at the parousia

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Heiser, Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God, Accessed: <http://www.twincityfellowship.com/special/DT32BibSac.pdf> Note: Heiser proves that the LXX reading of Deuteronomy 32:8 is superior to that of the MT. The "sons of Israel" in the MT is better understood to be "sons of god," and represent the fallen angels that God set in control over the nations.

of Christ in 2 Thessalonians 2:8, “Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming.” This is a particular problem for pre-wrath because of their insistence on a “one parousia” event that occurs during the last 42 months of the 70<sup>th</sup> week. This would mean that Antichrist is slain prior to the completion of his 42 month reign spoken of in Revelation 13:5.

They attempt to get around such problems in two ways: 1.They claim that the word “slay” (ανελεῖ) means the removal of the authority of Antichrist, not necessarily his death. This is not likely, however, because the Greek verb ἀναίρω is used 24 times in the New Testament, 22 times referring to killing. Only twice is the verb used to mean “take away.” Even more convincing is the fact that ἀναίρω was used in the Septuagint text of Isaiah 11:4 to indicate the slaying of the wicked by “the breath of His lips.” Isaiah 11:4 refers to how the shoot of Jesse will judge His enemies, and is very similar to the language in 2 Thessalonians 2:8, “Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the **breath of His mouth** and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming.” It is also similar to Revelation 19:15a, 19, “**From His mouth comes a sharp sword**, so that with it He may strike down the nations...And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.” The Revelation 19 passage makes it clear that this destruction of Antichrist happens at the end of the 70<sup>th</sup> week. This makes it difficult for pre-wrath to maintain one parousia since according to the evidence cited above, this must occur at the end of the 70<sup>th</sup> week. (Note: Pre-tribulation believes that you can use the term parousia to refer to either the rapture or the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming which are two different events.)

2. They claim that the parousia is a comprehensive single event that incorporates both the idea of coming and continued presence. Pre-wrath advocate Alan Kurschner writes on his website concerning the parousia:

The Greek word for "Coming" is Parousia. In the New Testament it is mentioned 17 times prophetically of our Lord Jesus' Second Coming. It means "presence" and also carries the meaning of an "arrival and a continuing presence." It is not an instantaneous event but rather it will occur over an unknown duration of time. The term is a noun, not a verb. The Lord's Coming (Parousia) is a comprehensive whole.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Alan Kurschner, lecture: [http://www.prewrathrapture.com/2006/09/consistency\\_between\\_jesus\\_and\\_paul.php](http://www.prewrathrapture.com/2006/09/consistency_between_jesus_and_paul.php)

There is a logical fallacy in attempting to maintain that Jesus can come bodily in the parousia, and then somehow be continually present –without being present bodily. Pre-wrath scholar Ryan Habbena likens the parousia to the 1<sup>st</sup> advent of Christ where there was one coming, but with many facets to Christ’s life such as: virgin birth, sinless life, 3 year ministry, etc.<sup>15</sup> The problem with this analogy is that it equivocates on the idea of presence. True, Christ was present for over 30 years during His first advent, but He **was present bodily!** The pre-wrath position maintains that Christ comes (parousia) to rapture His church, and then ascends to bring the church before the throne of God. Christ then is somehow “spiritually present” to bring judgment upon Antichrist’s dominion which rules the whole world. The problem is, if the parousia can be defined as Christ’s spiritual presence, then we can say that we are living today during the parousia! This is especially true in light of passages where Christ says, “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).

Pre-wrath proponents often criticize pre-tribulation proponents by pointing out that we believe in two different parousias, but in actuality, they must as well. There simply is no way for the parousia to occur, Christ to remain bodily, and for the Antichrist to remain in power for the last 42 months. They therefore would have to adapt their view and maintain a parousia to rapture the church sometime during the last 3 and ½ years of the 70<sup>th</sup> week, followed by a parousia to come and judge Antichrist and the nations at the end of the 70<sup>th</sup> week (Zechariah 14:1-4; Revelation 19:19). This would mean they also must have two different parousias.

If they maintain the idea of the parousia as being one coming with “continued presence,” then the pre-tribulation camp could also claim to hold to a “one parousia with continued presence” view as well. After all, pre-tribulation advocates believe Christ raptures the church, brings the saints to heaven (just like pre-wrath), and that Christ is pouring judgment upon those who dwell upon the earth which will be followed by the destruction of Antichrist at the end of the 70<sup>th</sup> week. The only difference would be the initial timing of the rapture.

Another problem with defining the parousia as always meaning “coming with continued presence” is that many texts in the Bible make it clear that the term can refer to only coming or to only presence.<sup>16</sup> An example of parousia referring to presence only can be found in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 10:10 which states, “For his letters, they say, ‘are weighty and powerful, but his bodily **presence** is weak, and his speech contemptible.’” Here we have a clear example of parousia meaning “presence” only. It would

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<sup>15</sup> Ryan Habbena, *The Parable Of The Fig Tree: Discerning The Signs That Herald Christ’s Return*. (Bellefonte, Pennsylvania: Strong Tower Publishing, 2009), 149.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Karleen, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture Of The Church: Is It Biblical?* (Langhorne, Pennsylvania: BF Press, 1991), 82.

make no sense to think the Corinthian opposition to Paul thought that his “coming with presence” was weak! The same can be said of the use of parousia in Philippians 2:12 which states, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my **presence** only, but now much more in my absence...” Here again we see that parousia must refer to presence only. Parousia can also refer to only coming as evidenced in Matthew 24:3, “...Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your **coming**, and of the end of the age?” It would be quite redundant if the disciples meant, “what will be the sign of Your coming with presence.” Obviously, when Jesus comes bodily – He will be with His people!<sup>17</sup>

Dr. Paul Karleen points out that those who claim that parousia must always mean “coming with presence” are committing the linguistic error of *illegitimate totality transfer* in which the meanings of words found in different occurrences are all poured into one type of occurrence.<sup>18</sup> Karleen says it well when he states, “That sometimes people come and stay, does not mean that coming and staying are always linked, either in life in general or in regard to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>19</sup>

A final point must be addressed related to the parousia and the rapture. Pre-wrath advocates claim that Revelation 7:14 is a reference to the rapture. This is an extremely important verse to pre-wrath because if it can be proven that the saints in Revelation 7:14 are in heaven because of martyrdom instead of the rapture – it would make the pre-wrath position invalid.

Revelation 7:14 records the answer the elder gives to John regarding those John saw clothed in white robes: “...And he said to me, ‘These are the ones who **come out of** the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’” Notice that in this text the saints are not coming out after the tribulation, but from the midst of it. Pre-wrath’s belief that this is the rapture contradicts Matthew 24:29-30 which teaches, “But **immediately after** the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky...” The cosmic signs associated with Christ’s second coming in Matthew 24:29 occur after the tribulation period. This is why pre-tribulation proponents are correct in seeing this occur at the end of the 70<sup>th</sup> week (Revelation 19:11), not during the last 3 ½ years (Revelation 7:14) as Pre-wrath claims. This contradiction is fatal to the pre-wrath view because if Revelation 7:14

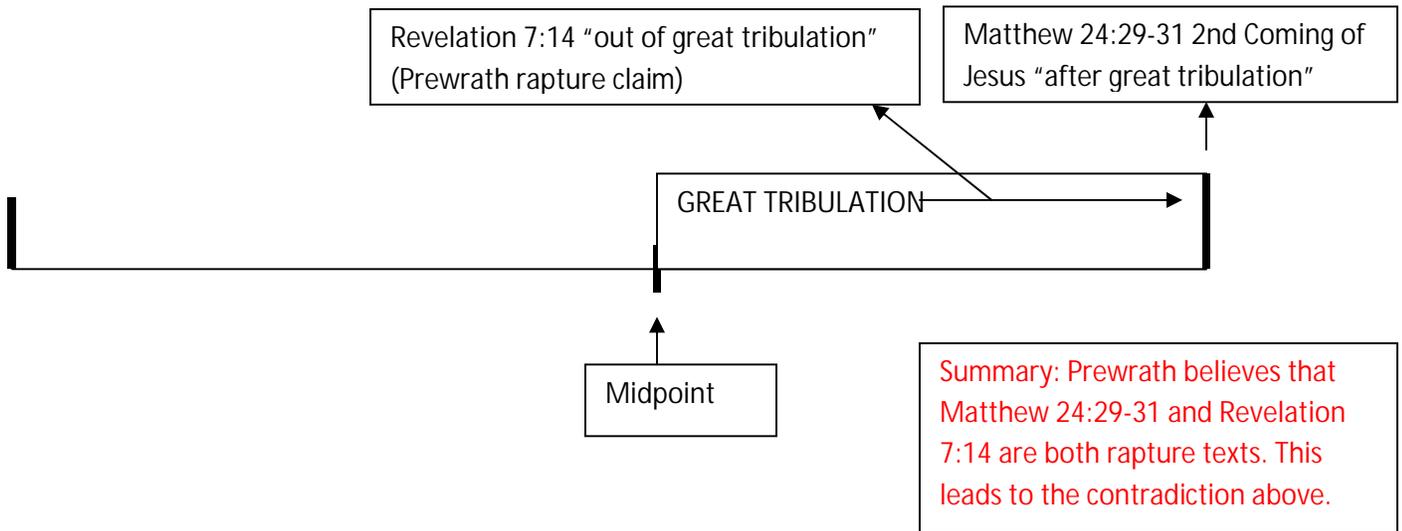
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<sup>17</sup> Karleen, Pre-Wrath, 82-83.

<sup>18</sup> Karleen, Pre-Wrath, 83.

<sup>19</sup> Karleen, Pre-Wrath, 83.

cannot be the rapture of the church (and it cannot), then the pre-wrath rapture view is false. Below is a chart demonstrating the contradiction of the pre-wrath position:



### **GOD’S WRATH COMES—WHEN?**

One final issue must be raised even though the concept is not necessarily connected to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2 passage per se. The concept of God’s wrath, and when that wrath comes is so central to the pre-wrath tribulation view that it must be addressed in this discussion. Pre-wrath distinguishes between the tribulation, great tribulation, and the time of God’s wrath. They maintain that the church will be raptured after the time of great tribulation, but before “the day of the Lord.” They maintain that “the day of the Lord” is the only period during the 70<sup>th</sup> week in which God’s wrath is poured out. They maintain that the wrath of man, Satan, and God are all completely separated, and that God’s people are only protected from His wrath.<sup>20</sup> This ensures that the rapture must happen in the last half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week. There are several problems with this view:

1. God’s wrath is seen in the first half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week as evidenced in the fourth seal (Revelation 6:8).
2. God’s wrath occurs during the second half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week as evidenced in the 6<sup>th</sup> seal (Revelation 6:17).
3. Pre-wrath must also maintain that the great tribulation period is less than 42 months in order for “the day of the Lord” to fit into the last half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week. Their appeal to Matthew 24:22 to prove that the great tribulation is cut short, however, is actually based on the fallacy of the false

<sup>20</sup> Marivn Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture Of the Church*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 112.

dilemma.<sup>21</sup> In other words, we are never told in Scripture the original amount of time the great tribulation was going to be, nor are we told to what time the great tribulation will be cut. All we know is that it is repeatedly referred to as 42 months in the Scriptures (Revelation 11:2; 12:6; 13:5 etc.). Pre-wrath scholars merely assert that it must be cut from 42 months to something less than that. It is very likely, however, that God has cut the great tribulation down to 42 months from some greater time period that He never disclosed. Matthew 24:22 simply does not prove that the great tribulation period will be anything less than the 42 months that is repeatedly taught in the book of Revelation.

The 4<sup>th</sup> seal gives important clues that the wrath of God is being poured out upon the earth and not just the wrath of Satan or man as pre-wrath claims. Revelation 6:8 describes how ¼ of the earth was killed. John explains that a pale green horse which is personified as Death (with Hades following) is given authority to kill ¼ of the earth. The question that must be asked is, “Who gave that authority?” Most naturally – it was God. What’s more, the instrumental means that are used to kill a fourth of the earth’s population are the sword (warfare), famine, pestilence, and wild beasts. These are the exact same means God used to pour His wrath out upon Israel in Ezekiel 5:17; 14:21. “Thus My anger will be spent and I will satisfy **My wrath** on them...Moreover I will send on you **famine** and **wild beasts**, that they will bereave you of children; **plague** and bloodshed also will pass through you, and I will bring the **sword** on you, I, the LORD have spoken” (Ezekiel 5:13, 17). God also uses the same four means in Ezekiel 14:21, “For thus says the Lord GOD, ‘How much more when I send My four severe judgments against Jerusalem: **sword, famine, wild beasts** and **plague** to cut off man and beast from it!’” God uses the exact means to pour out judgment on the unbelieving world in Revelation 6:8, yet pre-wrath proponents are certain that this is not God’s wrath!

Further evidence that Ezekiel 14:21 incorporates God’s wrath is the usage of hmj in 14:19; “Or if I should send a plague against that country and pour out My **wrath** in blood on it to cut off man and beast from it...” It is extremely significant that there is such a strong correlation between Ezekiel 5:13, 17; 14:21 and Revelation 6:8 because John formulates Revelation’s theology by alluding to the Old Testament. Henry Barclay Swete claimed that John alluded to the Old Testament 278 times in the 404 verses in the book of Revelation.<sup>22</sup> The question the honest exegete must ask is, “Why would

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<sup>21</sup> Karleen, Pre-Wrath, 44.

<sup>22</sup> As quoted by Renald Showers, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture View: An Examination And Critique*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 68.

John cite the Old Testament regarding the exact means God used to pour His wrath out in the Old Testament, yet attribute these things merely to Satan?”

God’s wrath also occurs during and before the 6<sup>th</sup> seal in the sixth chapter of Revelation. This is also devastating to pre-wrath because, in their view, there cannot be wrath until the trumpet judgments. Revelation 6 depicts six of the seven seals that are opened by the Lamb in judgment upon the world. The debate between pre-trib. and pre-wrath focuses on Revelation 6:12-17 where the sixth seal is depicted as being opened. John writes, “and they said to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath **has come**, and who is able to stand’” (Revelation 6:16-17)? Pre-wrath scholars claim that the aorist, active, indicative, verb – ηλθεν (has come) indicates a future coming of the wrath mentioned in verse 17. Pre-trib. scholars maintain that the verb reflects either a past or present tense – either of which would indicate there is wrath during the great tribulation. How can we tell which view is correct? We can tell by how John uses the verb in other passages of Revelation, especially in similar situations.

There are twelve occurrences of ηλθεν in the book of Revelation, six have to do with the action of events, and six have to do with the action of people. All six of the usages pertaining to the action of people occur either in the past or the present. Not one is futuristic! John seems to use ηλθεν as a means of description within his running account of what is revealed to him. For example, John recounts in Revelation 8:3 what he saw: “Another angel **came** and stood at the altar...” Here John is using ηλθεν to describe the actions of the vision that he was given. This means that it would have been natural for the events that he was describing to be present or already having occurred in his vision – otherwise he could not have described them.

We are left with 5 other occurrences (minus 6:17) of the verb that are related to events. They are:

Revelation 11:18 And the nations were enraged, and your wrath **came...**

14:7 Fear God...because the hour of His judgment **has come...**

14:15 ...for the hour to reap **has come...**

18:10 ...For in one hour your judgment **has come.**

19:7 ...for the marriage of the Lamb **has come...**

Alan Kurschner claims that both Revelation 14:15 and 19:7 are ingressive aorists.<sup>23</sup> This is certainly possible, but ηλθεν is more likely being used in these texts to indicate that the time for the given event was present. Notice that in Revelation 14:15 John records an angel declaring that the “hour” to reap had come (ηλθεν). Notice that the focus on what had come was the “hour,” not the act of reaping. For the sake of argument let us say that I was going to be married at 3:00 p.m. on a certain day. If I stated exactly at 3:00 p.m. “The hour of my marriage **has come**,” would anyone claim that the time was not present merely because we had not yet exchanged rings? Revelation 14:15 surely indicates that the “hour” was present. Furthermore, Kurschner fails to mention Revelation 18:10 which speaks of God’s judgment as being a past event. “And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment **has come**’” (Revelation 18:9-10). Notice that this passage records the statement of kings who had seen the judgment of Babylon already occur.

In summary, Revelation 11:18; 14:7; 14:15; and 19:7 all speak of events that are present. Revelation 18:10 speaks of judgment that has occurred in the past because the passage depicts the reaction of the kings of the earth who are lamenting after they see the destruction of Babylon. Pre-wrath would have to insist that John departed from the normal way he used ηλθεν (past or present) in all the other 11 occurrences of the aorist, active, indicative form in Revelation.

Daniel Wallace also cites that the aorist indicative normally indicates past time.<sup>24</sup> Based on the evidence of the usage of ηλθεν in Revelation, and the way the aorist indicatives normally function, it is highly unlikely that the wrath mentioned in Revelation 6:17 could be construed as occurring after the great tribulation.

It will also not help the pre-wrath cause to claim that Revelation 6:10 proves that there has been no judgment (in the sense of God’s wrath) until after the 6<sup>th</sup> seal.<sup>25</sup> The answer God gives to the martyrs question (“how long...will you refrain from judging and avenging our blood”) is given in Revelation

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<sup>23</sup> Alan Kurschner, “The First Six Seals Are Not God’s Wrath,” n.p. [cited 13 June 2009]. Online: [http://www.prewrathapture.com/2009/06/the\\_first\\_six\\_seals\\_are\\_not\\_gods\\_wrath\\_1.php](http://www.prewrathapture.com/2009/06/the_first_six_seals_are_not_gods_wrath_1.php)

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond The Basics*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 555.

<sup>25</sup> Note: Pre-wrath claims that because the martyrs in Revelation 6:10 are crying out for God to judge and avenge their blood, the prior seals must not have been God’s wrath.

6:11: “And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, **until** the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.” Notice that God will not avenge the martyrs’ blood until all the tribulation martyrs have been killed. Revelation 20:4 teaches that the tribulation martyrs will get their resurrected bodies after the 70<sup>th</sup> week and just prior to the millennial kingdom. This means that God will avenge the blood of the martyrs at the end of the 70<sup>th</sup> week (Revelation 19:2, 19-21), not beginning with the 7<sup>th</sup> seal as pre-wrath claims. If pre-wrath proponents are consistent that Revelation 6:10 proves there has been no wrath of God up until the 7<sup>th</sup> seal, they must also maintain that there is no wrath through the entire 70<sup>th</sup> week.

### **THE DAY OF THE LORD**

Another blow to pre-wrath is delivered by 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:2-3 which teaches that “the day of the Lord” will come like a thief in the night to the unbelieving world. “While they are saying, ‘**Peace and safety!**’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape” (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:3). Remember, “the day of the Lord” for the pre-wrath proponent starts only after the 6<sup>th</sup> seal. This means the world is embroiled with warfare and death to the point where ¼ of the population dies, yet according to 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:3 “the day of the Lord” comes upon unbelievers who are saying “peace and safety!” It would seem very strange indeed to be in the middle of tremendous warfare and death – and claim “peace and safety!” This indicates that “the day of the Lord” must come prior to the carnage seen in the first 6 seals.

The evidence for “the day of the Lord” starting at the beginning of the 70<sup>th</sup> week is further bolstered by the fact that the term “labor pains” (ὠδίν) in 1 Thessalonians 5:3 is used as a term intimately tied to “the day of the Lord” (Isaiah 13:8; Jeremiah 6:24) and the birth pangs in Matthew 24:8. Isaiah 13:6-9 describe “the day of the Lord” that will fall upon Babylon, and one day the entire world (Isaiah 13:10-12). “Wail for the day of the LORD is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will fall limp and every man’s heart will melt. They will be terrified, pain and **anguish** will take hold of them; they will writhe like a woman in labor...” Here ὠδίν is used in the LXX of Isaiah 13:8 to indicate the “anguish like labor pains” that people will experience during “the day of the LORD.” Jesus links these “labor pains” with the beginning of the tribulation period in Matthew 24:8, “But all these things are merely the beginning of **birth pangs.**” Notice that “these things” Jesus is referring to are the events associated with the beginning of the tribulation – not the middle or end!<sup>26</sup> Paul

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<sup>26</sup> Note: An online pre-wrath commentary also admits the connection between birth pangs and the beginning of the 70<sup>th</sup> week: Online: <http://www.revelationcommentary.org/>

uses the same term (ὠδίν) in 1 Thessalonians 5:3 when referring to the labor pains that come about at the inception of “the day of the Lord” that occurs while the world is crying “peace and safety.”

## **SUMMARY**

In summary, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8 doesn't prove that the rapture cannot occur until the Antichrist has set himself up in the temple. 2 Thessalonians 2:4 does not teach that Antichrist's revelation is synonymous with his being set up in the temple. This verse functions to further describe who Antichrist is, not when he is revealed.

It is very unlikely that Michael the archangel is removed from his restraining role at the midpoint of the tribulation. If he is involved in restraint, it is best to see this in conjunction with the restraining power of government, and therefore likely that his removal occurs at the beginning of the tribulation.

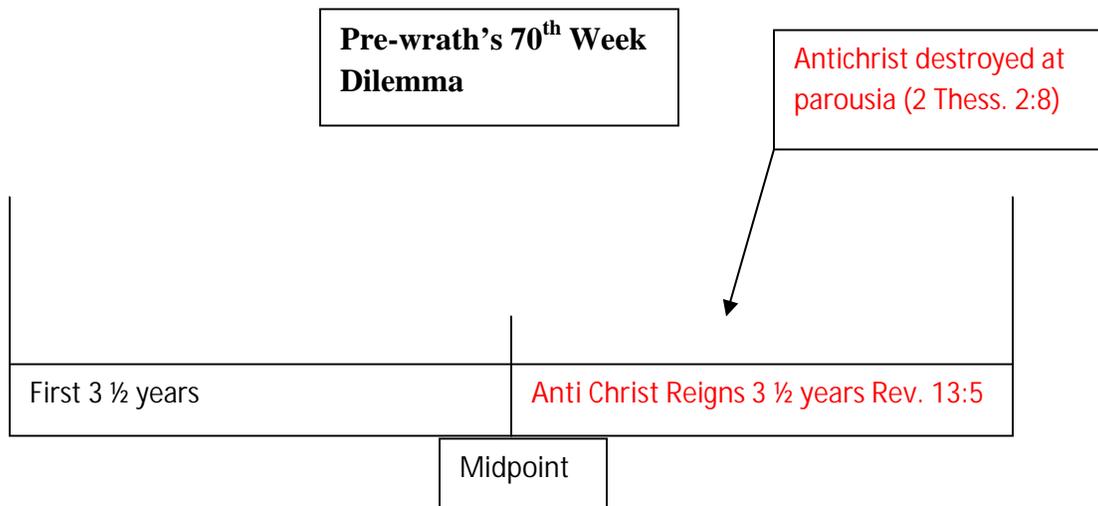
The pre-wrath definition of parousia should be amended. The fact that pre-wrath claims one parousia, yet maintains that Antichrist is not destroyed (2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2:8) is untenable. Either Jesus is physically present on earth during the last 3 and ½ years which would violate Revelation 13:5 (Antichrist reigns for 3 and ½ years), or He is in heaven which would violate the “coming with continued presence” concept of parousia that pre-wrath espouses. It also could then be claimed by pre-tribulation proponents that we believe in one parousia: Jesus raptures the church and goes to heaven (but is still present like pre-wrath asserts), finishes His wrath, and finally judges the nations bodily at Jerusalem.

God's wrath can be seen during the tribulation and great tribulation periods in texts such as Luke 21:23 and Revelation 6:17. If God's wrath is present during this time – the pre-wrath position is untenable.

If certainty can be claimed by pre-wrath, they must be able to prove with certainty the following areas:

1. God's wrath is not found in either the tribulation or great tribulation periods.
2. The restrainer is removed – and therefore the Antichrist is revealed at the midpoint of the tribulation.
3. The term parousia can mean both Christ's **physical** coming to earth and His **spiritual** presence on earth.
4. The great tribulation and the reign of Antichrist are less than 42 months.
5. The saints in Revelation 7:14 are raptured after the great tribulation, not martyred during the great tribulation.
6. The “day of the Lord” starts between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> seal judgments, not earlier.

I don't hold to my own pre-tribulation position with absolute certainty. If certitude must be asserted, then I will claim with certainty that Antichrist cannot both be destroyed at the parousia (2 Thessalonians 2:8) and continue to reign for 3 and ½ years (Revelation 13:5) as pre-wrath would have to maintain without engaging in a form of equivocation. Alan Kurschner writes on his internet website: "I list 20 reasons why Jesus and Paul teach on the **same, singular** future **Parousia** (Coming). This is the position of the Prewrath Rapture."<sup>27</sup> My chart below shows the contradiction to which this position leads:



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27 Alan Kurschner, "Consistency Between Jesus and Paul: The Singular Future Parousia of Christ," n.p. [cited 24 September 24 2006]. Online: [http://www.prewrathrapture.com/2006/09/consistency\\_between\\_jesus\\_and\\_paul.php](http://www.prewrathrapture.com/2006/09/consistency_between_jesus_and_paul.php)