

Rapture Terminology

The "Skeleton in the Closet" of Pretribulationism

By Tim Warner © www.4windsfellowships.net

"Technical terms" are nouns or descriptive noun phrases that are understood by the intended audience to refer to specific things even without explanation within the context. For example, the word "rapture" in modern prophetic speech is understood to refer to the coming of Christ for His Church. We do not normally need to refer to the context in which the word "rapture" might be found in modern Christian books to find out what "rapture" means. We simply assume the writer was referring to the coming of Christ for His Church. The word "tribulation" is another word that has taken on a technical meaning in modern Evangelical jargon. However, in the Bible, "tribulation" alone is not a technical term, because it is frequently used of troubles in general and not merely THE "tribulation." When the Bible means to indicate THE "tribulation," the words "great tribulation" are used (cf. Rev. 7:14).

In English, we use the definite article (the) sometimes to distinguish between a technical term and a non technical term. My usage of the word "tribulation" above demonstrates this. By my adding "THE" to tribulation, we understand a distinction between general "tribulation" and a specific "tribulation" known to us. However, this is not always the case in Greek.

What can make a term a technical term is it's repeated (or frequent) reference to the same thing or event in Scripture. Also, a term that is not clearly explained in the context shows that the writer assumed his readers knew what it meant. There was therefore common knowledge of technical terms between writer and reader. Such terms are not hard to spot and identify. We can discern technical terms from Scripture by their LACK of explanations within the context (the writer ASSUMES that the hearer or reader would understand the term). Secondly, by the EXCLUSIVE (or nearly exclusive) usage of the term in reference to a same event.

We have excluded the word "tribulation" from being a technical term in Scripture because it is often used of tribulations in general, without referring to THE "tribulation." Therefore, we need to review the CONTEXT where this word is found in order to decide if it is referring to THE "tribulation" or to some other kind of "tribulation." Because of this, we cannot ASSUME that when "tribulation" alone is used it means THE "tribulation." We therefore cannot rightly use the following verses to prove that the rapture is posttribulational, as some have mistakenly done.

John 16:33

33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Acts 14:22

22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

However, the over-all usage of technical terms in contexts dealing with the second coming weigh heavily in favor of the posttribulation position (and against all other rapture views including pre-wrath). These terms were understood by the first century believers to refer to a particular coming of the Lord without explanations in the context of being pre- or post-tribulational. Terms like, *The Day of the Lord*, *The Day of Christ*, *The Day of Jesus Christ*, *The Day of the Lord Jesus*, *The Day of the Lord Jesus Christ*, *The Day of God*, were all understood without any clarification. These terms were used by Paul and others with the full expectation that their readers knew that they referred to a specific single event. For example:

Phil 1:10

*10 that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till **the day of Christ**.*

Phil 2:16

*16 holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in **the day of Christ** that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.*

Paul assumed his readers knew what "day" he was speaking about. He did not explain in either verse whether this day was the coming of Christ BEFORE or AFTER the tribulation. He assumed his readers knew that the "Day of Christ" was the day for which they were watching and waiting. Therefore, it is right to associate it with the rapture (but not necessarily a pretribulation rapture). However, in 2 Thess. 2:1-3, Paul indicated that the Antichrist must come BEFORE the "Day of Christ." So, IF "Day of Christ" was a technical term, it is a POSTTRIBULATIONAL technical term, and the above verses must therefore refer to a rapture that is posttribulational.

Paul used other variations on the name of Christ, when referring to His "Day," as the future time for which believers watch and wait.

1 Cor 1:8

*8 who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in **the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

2 Cor 1:14

*14 (as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast as you also are ours, in **the day of the Lord Jesus.***

Phil 1:6

*6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until **the day of Jesus Christ;***

All of these terms are given without explanation. Logically, all refer to the same "day," because in each case this "day" seems to be the day on which believers had placed their hope, i.e., Christ's coming for His Church.

Likewise, the term "Day of the Lord" is simply another variation on the name of Christ. It is His day (Luke 17:24). The term is used in several contexts, each time the writer expected his readers to understand the specific day to which he referred without giving any explanation (pre- or post-tribulational). This is very problematic for pretribulationists. If the Apostles were pretribulationists (expecting two future comings of Christ), they would need to specify to their hearers or readers whether they were referring to a pre- or post-tribulational coming of Christ. Also, the term "Day of the Lord" was used repeatedly in the Old Testament in reference to Christ's posttribulational coming to set up His Kingdom (see: Isa. 13:1-13, Joel 3:9-17, Zech. 14:1-6). The Day of the Lord is unquestionably AFTER the tribulation (cf. Matt. 24:29 & Acts 2:20). Yet, in 1 Thess. 5:1,2, Paul used the term 'Day of the Lord' for the rapture.

Pretribulationists in the past (not so much anymore) tried to draw a distinction between the "Day of Christ" (pretribulation rapture) and the "Day of the Lord" (posttribulation coming). However, as pointed out above, this distinction fails because we find the term "Day of Christ" placed AFTER the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:1-3) and the term "Day of the Lord" referring to the day for which Christians watch (1 Thess. 5:1,2). Either the day for which Christians are watching is the posttribulation event, or else these are not technical terms. But, if they are not, then the passages are utterly confusing, because the writer ASSUMED that his audience KNEW which day he meant. The pretribulationist is forced to the awkward conclusion that Paul sometimes used the terms "Day of Christ" and "Day of the Lord" indiscriminately to refer to BOTH the (alleged) pretribulation rapture and posttribulation coming, and expected his audience to decipher which he meant with no clues whatever in the context!

The Elusive Search for a Biblical Pretribulation Rapture Technical Term

There is a conspicuous lack of a single technical term in the Bible for a pretribulation rapture (as distinct from the second coming). Pretribulationists have frantically searched for one, but always come up short. Having failed the "Day of Christ/Day of the Lord" distinction, many have tried to draw a distinction between the "rapture" and "revelation" of Christ. Yet, when we test ANY kind of alleged technical term in Scripture, the Bible fails to produce a single consistent technical term that could be applied to a pretribulation rapture that is not clearly applied to the posttribulation coming. Why? The obvious answer is the rapture is not distinct from the second coming, but is part of the same event! And the New Testament writers had no need to distinguish between two separate comings.

The modern word "rapture" is the word most often used as a technical term today by pretribulationists. Their uniform use of this term demonstrates the absolute necessity of having SOME kind of technical term for the alleged pretribulation rapture if it is indeed a distinct event. But, this word is NOT a technical term in the Bible. The word "rapture" is from the Latin text, and is found in the following verse.

1 Thess 4:17

17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up [Greek - harpazo, Latin - rapiemur] together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

However, this term CANNOT be taken as a technical term for an alleged pretribulation rapture because:

- it is a verb and not a noun in Scripture
- it is usually used of other things in Scripture besides the catching up of believers at Christ's coming (cf. Matt. 11:12, Matt. 12:29, Matt. 13:19, John 6:15, John 10:12,28,29, Acts 8:39, Acts 23:10, 2 Cor. 12:2,4, Jude 1:23, Rev. 12:5). Only once is it used in connection with Christ's coming.

Other proposed technical terms also fail to refer exclusively to a supposed pretribulation event, but are also used in clearly posttribulation contexts.

As pointed out already, pretribulationists have tried to distinguish between "rapture" and "revelation." The word "rapture" fails the test for the above reasons. But, how does the term "revelation" stack up as being exclusively posttribulation in order to distinguish the posttribulation coming from an alleged pretribulation coming)? If the pretribulation theory were true, we would expect that the term "revelation" would

ONLY be used of the posttribulation event (as opposed to the alleged pretribulation rapture), and NEVER of the day Christians anticipate. Yet, this is not the case.

There are three main Greek nouns used in Scripture for the coming of Christ.

1. parousia (Strong's #3952) simply means "coming" or physical "presence."
2. epiphaneia (Strong's #2015) means "appearing" or "brightness" with emphasis on His glory.
3. apokalupsis (Strong's #602) means "revelation" or "unveiling."

All of these are nouns used as technical terms in Scripture, while assuming that the reader understands the coming to which the words refer. However, the Scriptures use each of these terms for BOTH the Christians' hope AND the posttribulation event. The obvious conclusion is they are the same event.

Jesus' COMING (Parousia) as our hope: 1 Cor. 15:23, 1 Thess. 2:19, 1 Thess. 4:15, 1 Thess. 5:23, 2 Thess. 2:1, James 5:7,8, 2 Pet. 3:4, 1 John 2:28

Jesus' COMING (Parousia) as the posttribulation event: Matt. 24:3,27,39, 1 Thess. 3:13, 2 Thess. 2:8

Jesus' APPEARING (Epiphaneia) as our hope: 1 Tim. 6:14, II Tim. 4:1,8

Jesus' APPEARING (Epiphaneia) as the posttribulation event: 2 Thess. 2:8, Titus 2:13

Jesus' REVELATION (Apokalupsis) as our hope: 1 Cor. 1:7, 1 Pet. 1:7,13, 1 Pet. 4:13

Jesus' REVELATION (Apokalupsis) as the posttribulation event: 2 Thess. 1:7

The bottom line is this: Posttribulationists can rightly claim ALL of the following terms as technical terms referring to the one and only future coming of Christ: *Day of Christ*, *Day of Jesus Christ*, *Day of the Lord Jesus*, *Day of the Lord Jesus Christ*, *Day of the Lord*, *parousia* (His coming), *epiphaneia* (His appearing), & *apokalupsis* (His revelation). Pretribulationists are forced to abandon all of these as technical terms for the supposed pretribulation rapture (because they are all used at least once in a clear posttribulation context). Instead they wrongly use a verb (harpazo - "caught up") as a noun (rapture) in order to INVENT a non-biblical technical term for their alleged pretribulation coming that is supposed to be distinguished from the second coming (with absolutely no precedent in Biblical usage). That there is no Biblical term for an alleged pretribulation

coming should give pretribulationists considerable pause that they may be forcing the Scriptures to fit into their preconceived theory.

Misuse of the Word "Church" as a Technical Term

A second abuse of biblical terminology by pretribulationists is their false and misleading usage of the word "Church." Their usage is governed by the dispensational parameters they have erected. To a pretribulationist, the "Church" is strictly a technical term referring to Christians saved after Pentecost and prior to the tribulation. Believers prior to Pentecost were not part of the "Church" nor are those saved after the beginning of the tribulation. Hence, the term "Church age" (an utterly nonbiblical term) has been coined to delineate the parameters of the pretribulationists' fabricated "Church" on earth. But, once again, the Scriptures transgress the pretribulationists' jargon. Or more accurately, pretribulation jargon transgresses the Scriptural precedents and norms of terminology.

Jesus gave instructions in Matthew 18:17 regarding Church discipline, within a book that pretribulationists strenuously claim is not related to the "Church," and was written prior to the Church being established in their dispensational scheme. Stephen, in his defense before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:38, referred to the Jewish believers under Moses as "the Church in the wilderness." In Hebrews 2:12, Paul quoted Psalm 22:22, which speaks of the Old Testament Jews in worship, as "the Church." In most English Bibles, this Psalm is translated "congregation" rather than "Church." However, the quote was from the Greek version of the Old Testament used by the early Church called the Septuagint (LXX). The New Testament writers frequently quoted this version in their New Testament books, even many times where it reads differently from the Hebrew Text we have today. In the LXX, the Greek word for "Church" (ekklesia) is found repeatedly in the Old Testament, usually referring to the people of God (Israel). Since the Apostles and the early Christians to whom they wrote used this version, and since this version uses "Church" (ekklesia) for the Old Testament saints repeatedly, it is not likely that the early Christians had the same understanding of this term that modern pretribulationists have fabricated. Once again we find pretribulationists forced to use artificial technical terminology that is NOT in agreement with biblical precedent and common usage of the early Church. We don't let cults or Catholics get away with such subtle shell games with biblical words, why do we permit it by pretribulationists? The simple fact is, the wrong usage of terminology by pretribulationists, and artificial distinctions in their jargon, are glaring indicators of a false system that is being forced on the Scriptures.