

# THE RAPTURE IN CHRIST'S OLIVET DISCOURSE

BY

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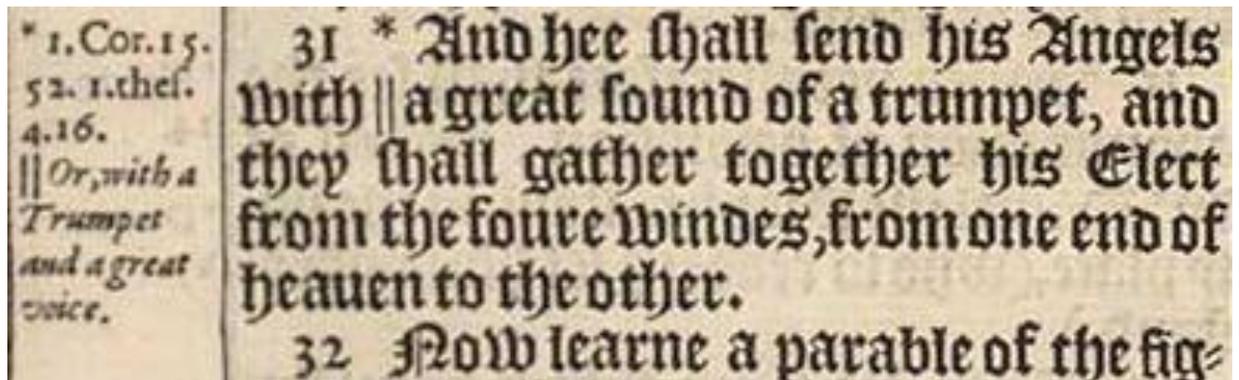
In Mark, chapter 13, an abbreviated representation of the Olivet Discourse is presented. In the Gospel of Luke, the Olivet Discourse seems to be separated into several parts throughout the gospel. But beginning in Matthew 24, 97 verses were penned by Matthew in the most comprehensive eschatological presentation found in the four gospels. Matthew, Mark and Luke combine to present all that is recorded from the Lord's mouth on that special day when he sat his disciples down on the Mount of Olives and answered the following questions:

## Matthew 24:3

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, **when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?**

Since the additional question "and of the end of the world" is included, we call this an eschatological discourse because eschatology is the study of the last (or end) things. In this discourse, Jesus makes it clear that His (Second) Coming (*parousia*) occurs after the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:29). This Second Coming is not debated by conservative premillennial scholars, commentators, and authors. In fact, nearly anyone that identifies themselves as a fundamentalist or an evangelical affirms that this current age will end with the Second Coming of Christ. However, what is not widely agreed upon is: Did our Lord make reference to a rapture of the church

(*ekklesia*) in this passage? Those who hold to a pretribulation rapture of the church deny the presence of the rapture in Olivet



Discourse.<sup>1</sup> But others see a relationship between Matthew 24.31 and 1 Thessalonians 4.15-17 and 1 Corinthians 15.51-52. For example, notice the marginal note in the original AV 1611 KJV next to Matthew 24.31. In this case, the translation committee refers the reader to two additional texts to consider: 1 Corinthians 15.52 and 1 Thessalonians 4.16.

## Matthew 24:31

And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

## 1 Corinthians 15:52

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

## 1 Thessalonians 4:16

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

<sup>1</sup> Concerning Matthew 24.40-41 John MacArthur writes: "This is clearly not a reference to the catching away of believers described in 1 Thess. 4:16, 17" (*The MacArthur Study Bible*, 1997).

1 Thessalonians 4:16 is verse before the classic pretribulation rapture proof text. In 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Paul tells the church at Thessalonica that when Jesus returns, those who are alive will be “caught up” to meet Jesus in the air. The words “caught up” come from the single Greek word *harpazo*, which was translated *rapturo* in the Latin and thus, “rapture” in English. The word *harpazo* is a verb. Verbs describe actions whereas nouns describe persons, places, things, events, etc. While it is true that verbs become verbal nouns when “ing” is added to the verb, what must be understood in 1 Thessalonians 4 is that the name of the event has already been identified by Paul in v. 15. Paul says he is talking about the “coming of our Lord.” The rapture in this case is not a separate event, but instead, is one of the actions that will occur when the *parousia* takes place. It is difficult to imagine that after making specific reference to the *parousia* in verse 15 that Paul, just two verses later, is describing a distinct event that that will occur 7 years **before** the *parousia* of Matthew 24. Therefore, at face value it seems best to conclude that at the Coming of the Lord, the Lord—through His holy angels—will *harpazo* the saints that are alive when He returns as described in the Olivet Discourse.

In both Matthew’s and Luke’s record of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus’ narrative of people being “caught up” and others being left behind is included. This is described in Matthew 24:40-41 and Luke 17:34-36. Although the Greek words are not the same in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and in the gospels, it is the same Greek word, *paralambano*, in Matthew 24:40-41, Luke 17:34-36, and John 14:3. In John 14:3 Jesus states He is going to *take* believers back to be with him, which some pretribulationists believe is a reference to the rapture of the church.

Matthew 24:40–41

40 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 41 Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Luke 17:34–36

34 I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. 35 Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. 36 Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

John 14:3

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive [take] you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

Jesus said in that day of His Return (after the Great Tribulation, Matthew 24:29), two will be in the field and one will be taken and the other left behind. In that day, women will be grinding at the mill and one will be taken and the other left behind.

What the text does not say in Matthew and Luke is whether the saint is being taken and the unbeliever left behind, or whether the unbeliever is taken and the saint is left behind. The issue is significant because if it can be determined that the saint is the one taken, then it appears that Paul is not describing a mystery event previously undisclosed, but is rather making reference to what Jesus taught in all four of the gospels.

**Four Reasons**

There are four reasons why I believe the most natural interpretation of Matthew 24:31, 40-41; Mark 13:27; Luke 17:34-36; and John 14:3 is that Jesus is describing the rapture of believers that occurs when He returns to

destroy the wicked and establish His Kingdom and that this event is the same *harpazo* of believers that Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 4.17.

1. The first reason why I believe Matthew 24.40-41 is describing the rapture of believers comes from Jesus' previous reference to angels gathering the elect in Matthew 24.31. In Mark 13:27 angels gather the elect from the earth and heaven.

Mark 13:27

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.

I believe the gathering of the elect is exactly what Jesus goes on to illustrate when he says one will be taken and the other left. The angels take Christians with them back to Jesus. The angels act as God's messengers (Revelation 19.17) and servants who gather all of whom are still alive and are part of the elect. The "elect" are the ones chosen by God; they are the saints; they are the born-again believers.

2. Reason number two comes from the context of the narrative in Matthew 24.40-41 and Luke 17.34-36. In the days of Noah, those outside the ark or those left [behind] when the rain came and the ark began to float who were killed by the flood. In Genesis 6.17 God says, "And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and everything that is in the earth shall die." Likewise in gospel narratives, those who are left will suffer the same fate as those left in Noah's day. The wrath of Almighty God will destroy them as described in Revelation 19.11-21. The ark protected Noah and seven others from the wrath of God, and the purpose of the gathering the elect is to remove them from the earth before the final consuming wrath of God is released against the wicked. The ark is a picture of the rapture before the Battle of Armageddon.

3. Reason number three comes from Luke's record of Jesus' words. In Luke's account, an additional detail is provided which is very helpful in properly interpreting what Jesus was communicating in the Olivet Discourse. Luke says that Jesus made reference to Lot, and this is very important. Notice below in v. 29 the specific reference to Lot leaving Sodom.

Luke 17:26-36

<sup>26</sup> And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. <sup>27</sup> They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. <sup>28</sup> Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; <sup>29</sup> But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed *them* all. <sup>30</sup> Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.

According to Genesis 19:1, God sent two angels to get Lot and his family out of Sodom before the destruction of the city occurred. Lot was not left behind. Lot was taken out. In fact, two angels were sent by God to take Lot out. In the same manner angels are mentioned Matthew 24.31, Mark 13.27, and 1 Thessalonians 4.16.

The Apostle Peter provides even greater clarity. In 2 Peter 2.7, Peter describes Lot as just and suggests that it was God who delivered Lot from the destruction. Peter also references Noah and the destruction in the same manner that Christ did. Peter states that God saved Noah and brought destruction upon the world. In v. 9 Peter says, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations [trials], and to reserve the unjust

unto the day of judgment to be punished.” The rapture is one of the ways God delivers the godly out of temptations.

So, in Luke’s record of the two in the field and one being taken and the other left, the inclusion of “just Lot” (2 Peter 2.7) as the one taken shows us that in Matthew 24 Jesus is not describing angels taking people to be judged as in Matthew 13.30 where reapers gather the tares. Instead, the specific reference to Lot makes it clear that in the same way two angels took Lot out of Sodom, angels are going to take the elect out of the way before God judges the world for its apostasy, idolatry, and utter wickedness.

4. Reason number four comes from John 14.3. In John 14, Jesus promises to return and receive “you” (disciples) to Himself. The disciples that heard those words died. Jesus did not return for them. I believe they surely thought He was going to return in their lifetime, but it was not God’s will to end the age at such an early time. In fact, concerning the delay of the Lord’s coming, Peter suggests that it may not happen for a very long time when he says a day with the Lord is as a 1000 years (2 Peter 3:8). In Luke 20:9, Jesus portrays Himself as the owner of a vineyard who would be gone for a “long time,” but the point of looking at John 14.3 is to examine the verb “receive” (KJV) in this verse.

#### John 14:3

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

This word “receive” is *paralambano*. It is the same word used by Matthew and Luke in the narrative of “the one shall be *paralambano* and the other left.” Although this does not prove the point, it adds even greater evidence to the truth that Jesus is not describing “one taken in judgment” where angels are gathering unbelievers to be judged (Matthew 13.30). At this point, it is helpful to examine the outline of the usage of this word from Strong’s Interlinear/Concordance or Lexicon.

1. to take to, to take with one's self, to join to one's self
  - a) an associate, a companion
  - b) metaph.
    - 1) to accept or acknowledge one to be such as he professes to be
    - 2) not to reject, not to withhold obedience
2. to receive something transmitted
  - a) an office to be discharged
  - b) to receive with the mind
    - 1) by oral transmission: of the authors from whom the tradition proceeds
    - 2) by the narrating to others, by instruction of teachers (used of disciples)

In the context of John 14.3, Jesus promises those whom He takes will be with him. This seems to fit the narrative of Matthew 24.31 well where angels are gathering the elect to be with Jesus at His Second Coming.

Based upon these four reasons it seems best to conclude that Jesus’ inclusion of the narrative of “one shall be taken and one left” from various locations and scenarios was a reference to the future rapturing of those who are alive and are part of the elect at the coming of Jesus, which occurs at the Revelation of Jesus Christ prior to the Battle of Armageddon. In fact, it would seem quite illogical to explain all the details of the tribulation to the disciples and future readers of the text (Mt 24.15) if the promise of being gathered or caught up occurs before the Abomination of Desolation. But we know from both the stories of Noah and Lot that once God

removed His people (the elect), the rest were immediately destroyed; first by water (with Noah) and then by fire (in Lot's case). Therefore, we can conclude that the gathering or taking away in Matthew 24.31 is not a pretribulation gathering where destruction comes seven years later but the gathering that occurs at Christ's *Parousia*. Moreover, it is very interesting that Paul used nearly the same Greek word in 2 Thessalonians 2.1 (Strong's G1997) for "gather" as Jesus did in Matthew 24.31 (Strong's G1996).

While it is true that this does not prove that the church will not be raptured before the tribulation, it does show that Jesus did not reference a pre-tribulation rapture in the Olivet Discourse. Moreover, it shows that there is a strong probability that Paul was not teaching the church at Thessalonica about a pretribulation rapture which was distinct or separate from the *parousia*. We can conclude this with an even greater degree of assurance because of Paul's reference to the need to see the "son of perdition" in 2 Thessalonians 2.1-4 before the Day of the Christ [Lord]. Paul follows the chronological order of Christ's narrative in making specific reference to the Abomination of Desolation occurring before He returned in Matthew 24:15.

At this point, the only text left to consider from the Apostle Paul for a separate pretribulation rapture event is 1 Corinthians 15. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul makes specific reference to the dead in Christ being raised from the grave (v. 21, 23 and 52) and being changed "in a twinkling of an eye." All evangelicals and fundamentalists agree that Paul is describing the glorious time in the future when those who are in Christ receive their glorified bodies. But when does this happen? According to 1 Corinthians 15:24, this change event happens just before "the end." Verse 24 says "then *cometh* the end." In 1 Corinthians 12.22 Paul writes of "his *parousia*" where his is understood to be a reference to Christ. It is difficult to imagine that Paul is describing an event that occurs 7 years before the end. Is this the same *parousia* in 1 Thessalonians 4.15? And is this the same *parousia* in Matthew 24 referenced four times, or is this a different *parousia*? Perhaps at this point it would be helpful to examine the lexicon usage of *parousia*. Notice usage number 1 is "presence." When Christ returns he establishes a presence on this earth. According to Zechariah 14.4 his feet stand on the Mt. Olives in Jerusalem.

- 1) presence
- 2) the coming, arrival, advent
  - a) the future visible return from heaven of Jesus, to raise the dead, hold the last judgment, and set up formally and gloriously the kingdom of God

Are there two *parousia* events or one *parousia* event? In so much as nothing is mentioned about the Abomination of Desolation spoken of by the exiled prophet Daniel to the church at Corinth in either of the two letters in the NT canon, we need to look at Paul's reference to the "last trumpet" (1 Corinthians 15.52). Is this a different trumpet and a different blast from the one referenced in Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 4, or is this the same sound and the same event? There is nothing in the text that says that this is the same event or isn't the same event. Paul doesn't write like that. The reader must decide for himself; but the natural conclusion with the same Greek word *parousia* being used, the dead being resurrected like in 1 Thessalonians 4, and the "last trumpet" being specifically mentioned is that Paul is not describing a different pretribulation event from Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 4.13-17.

Moreover, the chapter concludes with death being swallowed up in victory, which hardly makes sense if this is a pretribulation resurrection of the dead in Christ (v. 54-55) when the reader knows from the book of Revelation that saints will be put to death during tribulation by the thousands upon thousands. Saints are dying for the cause of Christ throughout the book of Revelation. In Revelation 6.10-11 there are a specific number of saints that must die before the sixth seal is opened, and the wrath of God is poured out against the beast (Revelation 6:17).

### King James Version

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? 11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

### English Standard Version

10 They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” 11 Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

How is death swallowed up in victory if there are still seven more years of death? Again, it seems best to conclude that Paul’s reference to the dead in Christ being raised from the grave includes all who die during Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week (the 7 year tribulation) such that there is one final resurrection of the righteous from the grave before the kingdom of God is established. Furthermore, if Paul is describing the first resurrection before Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week comes, how can he write in verse 24:

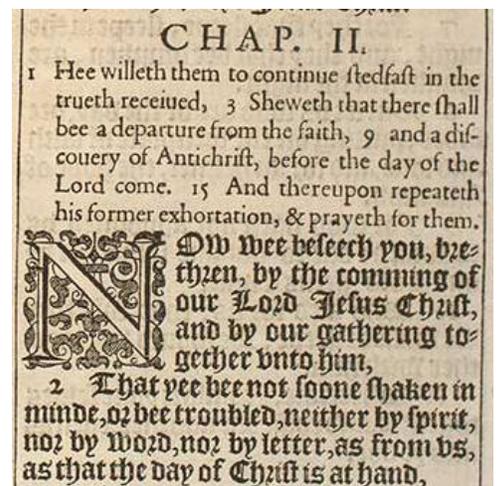
### 1 Corinthians 15:24

24 Then *cometh* the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.

In verse 24 the word “cometh” is not in the text. It is in italics in the KJV to remind the reader that the translation committee added that word. The most literal rendering is “then the end.” But how could Paul write “then the end” if there were yet 7 more years till the second coming occurs where the kingdom would actually be established? Is this a reasonable question? Why wouldn’t Paul provide a better connection point? He knows about the Abomination of Desolation, yet he says nothing of this event. Instead, he writes “then the end” when Christ delivers the kingdom to the Father. But according to the classic rapture then revelation dispensational timeline, this does not happen for 7 more years—3 ½ of which will be hell on earth.

Moreover, one must consider the truth that the Apostle John in Revelation 20.5 makes it clear that the time between the resurrection of life and the resurrection of the rest of the dead is 1000 years. It is not 1007 years, nor does John permit his reader to create a third resurrection such that the resurrection “1 part A” occurs 7 years before the resurrection “1 part B,” and then 1000 years later the second resurrection of the dead occurs.

Again, this does not prove that there will not be a pre-tribulation rapture of the church, but it does prove that one should not attempt to get it from the Olivet Discourse. Moreover, in order to interpret that Paul teaches that the rapture will occur before the Abomination of Desolation, one must create two stages of Christ’s return from Paul’s letters to the church at Thessalonica, such that the coming (*parousia*) of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 4.15 is different from the *parousia* of the Lord in 2 Thessalonians 2.1-4. In so much as the Greek is the same, and 2 Thessalonians was written to correct a misunderstanding and false teaching circulating at the time of the letter concerning the coming of the Lord, it seems the plain interpretation would be to not separate the comings into two stages. Additionally, one must reinterpret the plain sense of “our gathering together unto him” in 2 Thessalonians 2.1 into



a different heavenly event occurring after the rapture; yet the natural interpretation would be that Paul is describing the same gathering that is described in Matthew 24.31, Mark 13.27 and 1 Thessalonians 4.17. An examination of the AV 1611 introductory notes to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 reveals that the translation committee believed that in spite of the reference to “day of Christ” in 2 Thessalonians 2.2, Paul was still referencing the “Day of the Lord,” which would not happen until the “discovery of the Antichrist” (see the digital copy of the above). Paul seems to be following the timeline in the Olivet Discourse as he insists that the church at Thessalonica has not missed Christ’s *Parousia*, for it will not occur and “our gathering together unto him” will not happen before the Abomination of Desolation (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2.3-4). In fact, it appears that Paul is reminding the church at Thessalonica concerning the same signs Christ taught the disciples. Paul seems to use “our gathering” like he used “we which are alive” in 1 Thessalonians 4.17. He includes himself in this category because Paul believes he could be alive when the “man of sin [is] revealed, the son of perdition.” Thus, Paul can look for the Lord’s return in his lifetime. Finally, a detailed comparative analysis between Paul’s two letters to the church at Thessalonica and the Olivet Discourse reveals an overwhelming number of parallels which makes it difficult to imagine that Paul’s eschatology includes an event that Jesus did not reveal to the Twelve. (See the chart at the end of the essay.)

Pretribulationists must not be dogmatic concerning the assertion that Paul revealed a mysterious rapture of the church occurring before the Abomination of Desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel in either 1 Thessalonians 4-5 or 1 Corinthians 15. There are far too many potential problems with supporting a pretribulation rapture from the four gospels, 1 Corinthians 15, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians to permit one to be dogmatic in the assertion that the church will not go through the tribulation. A wise shepherd will tell his people to be prepared for tribulation and to watch for the coming of the Lord according to the signs Christ revealed in the Olivet Discourse and reinforced by the Apostles. In Mark 13:35-37 Jesus said,

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: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. **And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.**

Luke records Jesus telling those listening to Him and all who would read Luke’s Gospel that “when these things [all the signs previously identified] begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21.28). All Christians need to know the signs of Christ’s *Parousia*. And looking for the signs does not mean that one is looking for the Antichrist instead of Christ. On the contrary, the one looking for the signs is doing precisely what Christ said to do: “Watch!” Jesus said, “Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near: So ye [followers of Jesus] in like manner, when ye shall **see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors** [emphasis mine] (Mark 13:28-29). “These things” is plural. Therefore, we are not looking for Jesus only; we are looking for the things He said would happen before He returns.

Are there other texts to be studied? Yes, and in the interest of focus and brevity I did not address Revelation chapters 3 and 4 in this essay. Let the reader pursue such an endeavor, for God is well pleased to have His Word searched daily by those who like the ancient Bereans “searched the scriptures daily” (Acts 17.10-11) to compare what they have been taught with what the Canon actually says to see whether Jesus or the Apostles taught that Christ will rapture the church before the tribulation. Is John a representation of the church being raptured? Is the promise to the church at Philadelphia a promise of protection or rapture? Does the promise apply to all churches or only faithful churches? These are just some of the questions that need to be asked and answered. As a final point, Baptist traditions, novels, movies, dispensational charts, commentaries, and preconceived ideas must be set aside. The only authority for eschatology is the Word of God.

**A Comparative Analysis of the  
Christ's Olivet Discourse to Paul's Letters to the Church at Thessalonica**

<b>Biblical Text</b>	<b>Matthew &amp; Mark</b>	<b>1 Thessalonians</b>	<b>2 Thessalonians</b>
<b>1. Warning about Deception</b>	24.4/13.5		2.3
<b>2. Labor Pains/Pregnancy</b>	24.8 (birth pains)13.17	5.3	
<b>3. Tribulations/Persecutions</b>	24.9/13		1.4
<b>4. Abomination of Desolation</b>	24.15/13.14		2.2-3
<b>5. Coming (<i>Parousia</i> G3952)</b>	24.3,27,37,39	2.19; 3.13; 4.15; 5.23	2.1; 2.8-9
<b>6. Visible Descent from Heaven</b>	24.30	4.16	1.7
<b>7. Clouds</b>	24.30/13.26	4.17	
<b>8. Great Power/Day of the Lord</b>	24.30/13.26	5.2	1.9-10; 2.2; 2.8-9
<b>9. Archangel/ Angels</b>	24.31/13.27	4.16	1.7
<b>10. Sound/Shout</b>	24.31	4.16	
<b>11. Gathering/Caught Up</b>	24.31	4.17	2.1
<b>12. Souls from Heaven Coming</b>	24.31/13.27	3.13; 4.14	1.10
<b>13. People from Earth Gathered</b>	13.27	4.17	2.1
<b>14. Thief</b>	24.43	5.2	
<b>15. Watch</b>	24.42/ 13.35-37	5.6	
<b>16. Drunkards</b>	24.49	5.7	
<b>17. Destruction/Judgment</b>	24.51	5.3	1.5-9