

The pre-tribulational ‘Rapture’

by: RPD

The pre-tribulational ‘Rapture’ of the Church to heaven was rediscovered in the early 1800’s after being effectively lost to most Christians for about 1500 years. In the 1800’s it was clearly taught by men such as Darby, Kelly, Grant, Macintosh and Bellett. It soon became the accepted teaching among fundamental Christians and has remained so to this day. However, there always has been the majority teaching in professing Christianity called Covenant Theology which sees the Church as merely an extension of Old Testament Israel and thus subject to the covenants and the wrath of the Tribulation.

During the last decade a movement has developed among some who would consider themselves fundamentalists that attacks the pre-tribulational ‘Rapture’ and in its stead, strongly promotes a ‘pre-wrath’ Rapture. This teaching appears to be gaining adherents from onetime pre-tribulationists because of persuasive arguments that fearlessly reinterprets every verse used by pre-tribulationists to promote an imminent Rapture. We do not doubt the sincerity of these believers, but we believe they are very wrong. But because of the ramifications for the Church, we believe it is necessary to publicly refute these new teachings. Obviously, we cannot go into the detail of every argument in one Assembly Messenger: therefore, we suggest a book entitled, ‘The Pre-Wrath Rapture Answered’ by Lee Brainard, Gospel Folio Press, to those who want detail. We do not agree with all the book and warn that on page 209, he advocates the serious error of a second chance for those professors who find themselves not raptured, contrary to 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12. But he does an outstanding job when dealing with the subject material of this Newsletter.

The Pre-Wrath Position

We are going to assume you know something of the pre-tribulational view of the Rapture of the Church. We covered it in Assembly Messenger 97-3. For more detail, see my book, From Rapture to Reigning, Believers Bookshelf. See www.assemblymessenger.com for reading or

downloading issue 97-3 and for links to Believers Bookshelf.

What then is the pre-wrath position? Simply put, they believe the Rapture takes place several weeks or months before the battle of Armageddon, so the Church has to experience the ‘wrath of Satan’ including the mark of the beast, but not the ‘wrath of God’ which, they argue, only begins when the Church is raptured and the Tribulation is about to end. They argue that this is the uniform teaching of the Lord in Matthew 24; of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4-5; of Peter in 2 Peter 3; and of John in Revelation. So, for them, there is no imminent hope of the Church to be caught up to heaven before the Tribulation begins. Rather, the Church needs to prepare for the terrible time ahead. This is entirely an issue of ‘rightly dividing the Word of Truth’ (2 Tim.2:15). Let’s begin with Matthew 24.

Matthew 24

The Lord’s disciples asked the Lord, ‘‘When will these things [that the Lord had just spoken of] be? And what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?’’ (24:3). The time of this conversation was not as yet in the Christian dispensation, the Church Age. The disciples knew very little about Christianity or the Church. The Lord had mentioned a few things, but with very little understanding on the part of the disciples. Now, here they are shortly before the crucifixion, and they ask these questions, not realizing the Church, like a great 2000+ year parenthesis in God’s dealings with Israel, was about to intervene.

The pre-wrath advocates argue that the Lord told the disciples of future things as representatives of the future Church, so the events foretold are for the Church. The view (dismissed by the pre-wrathites) of the pre-tribulationists is that these disciples represented at that moment the future Jewish remnant, saved during the Tribulation, that will pass through the horrors of the Tribulation.

The language of verses 4-15 does not define who the ‘‘you’’ refers to, but since the Lord was speaking to Jewish disciples, it is more than logical that He is

referring to future Jewish disciples when the prophesied events take place. But things become clearly Jewish in the next verses. Midway through the “Tribulation” (and beginning the Great Tribulation – v.21) the “abomination of desolation” (Dan.12:11) is set up in the newly-constructed Jewish temple (2 Thes.2:3-4). Satan has just been cast from heaven (Rev.12:7-12) and as the pre-wrathists correctly say, he has great wrath because he knows his time is short. Woe to those believers on earth at that time.

Matthew 24:16-20 then tells those in Judea to flee and to pray it isn’t on a Sabbath. Would those instructions mean anything to the Church at large which for the most part has nothing to do with Judea and doesn’t keep the Sabbath? No, it is manifestly believing Jews of a future non-Church dispensation who are referred to, not the Church! This terrible time will be shortened for “the elect’s sake” (v.22) – shortened in the sense that the Lord will come on the appointed day exactly when the seven years of the Tribulation have run their course, and put an end to the attacks on God’s people. The pre-wrathites insist the elect are the Church; also in verse 31 that His elect will be gathered from the four corners of the earth when He comes to “rapture” them. Two questions need answering: Who are these “elect” and why does the Lord come at that time?

The Elect

The prophecy of Isaiah 65:9-10, 22 plainly show there is to be a future Jewish elect. There are the present elect of the Church, but God always has a testimony for Himself. Revelation 7 shows that shortly after the Rapture, God saves 144,000 Jews who become His evangelists of the Tribulation and preach the gospel of the Kingdom, resulting in a great number being saved from every nation, who come through the Great Tribulation and stand before the Lord Jesus on His millennial throne (vv.9, 14-17; Isa.9:7; Jer.3:17; Ezek.43:7; Mt.19:28; 25:31). The pre-wrathists wrongly make this a heavenly throne. But these future, non-Church elect will not be people who have heard and rejected the gospel as preached today (2 Thes.2:10-12).

Why Does the Lord Come at that Time?

Matthew 24:29-31 speaks of immediately after the Great Tribulation the “Son of Man (generally a Jewish term) will appear in heaven ... coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” Revelation 1:7 adds, “Every eye shall see Him.” Zechariah 14:14:2-9 tells us in that day “His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives ... and the Lord will be King over all the earth.” This is the exact location of the Lord’s return promised the Jewish disciples in Acts 1:9-12. Matthew

25:31 tells us He will then sit on the throne of His glory, obviously on earth. Does anyone beside angels (Mt.25:31; 2 Thes.1:7) come with Him? Zechariah 14:5, Jude 14-15, 1 Thessalonians 3:13, Colossians 3:4 and Revelation 19:8,14 all show that when the Lord comes to reign, the saints (obviously raptured earlier) come with Him to reign with Him for 1000 years (Rev.20:4). It is a clear misuse of rightly dividing God’s Word to confuse any of these verses with the Rapture some 7 years previously.

Proof-Text of What the Tribulation is About

We wouldn’t know much about the timing of the so called “Tribulation” if it were not for Daniel 9:24-27. This prophecy unlocks the “timing” of God’s dealings with Israel. A time period of 70 “sevens” were determined on Daniel’s people, the Jews. 490 years are meant, at which time God’s dealings with Israel’s transgression would be finished and “everlasting righteousness” (the Millennium) would begin. After the end of 69 “weeks” (483 years) Messiah would be cut off. History has proven that Christ was crucified about a literal week after the 483 years were complete, when He presented Himself in Jerusalem as their King. Jerusalem then would shortly be destroyed. This happened in AD 70 when the Roman Empire army destroyed Jerusalem.

The people (ie, Roman Empire people) of that now long dead Roman prince who destroyed Jerusalem would confirm a covenant with Israel for one week (7 years). He would cause sacrifices (clearly Jewish) to cease in the middle of the week – the Great Tribulation thus beginning for Israel in particular. God’s wrath would be upon them till the exact number of those days were finished.

What was unknown to any Old Testament prophet was that some 2000 years would intervene between the time God stopped His prophetic clock at the close of 69 weeks and when He again restarts it. It will remain stopped until the above mentioned covenant is made between Israel and a revived Roman Empire (Western Europe). The Old Testament prophets did not know that He would bring in a brand new thing, the Church, called out from Jew and Gentile to be one body, to be the bride of Christ, which would fill that time gap. They did not know, whereas Israel’s blessings were earthly, that this new Church had a heavenly future and would meet the Lord in the air, not on earth. Only when this Church is removed can God’s prophetic clock of His dealings with Israel again be turned on. It seems our pre-wrath friends also do not know this. So, although the whole world is affected, the Tribulation is mainly God’s wrath on Israel, God using man’s and Satan’s wrath to fulfill His purposes with Israel (Ps.76:10).

The Teachings of Paul – 1 Thessalonians 4-5

The pre-wrath advocates claim that 1 Thessalonians gives the same story they advocated for Matthew 24. Indeed, it does! We wouldn't expect the Lord and His apostle to disagree. The difference is that Paul is writing to the Church, not simply to Jewish disciples.

The last verse of Chapter 3 is a prayer of Paul that the Thessalonians would so conduct themselves that the Lord would establish their hearts blameless in holiness before God at the "coming of the Lord Jesus with all His saints." That is the time of rewards for our present faithfulness to Christ. But what about those saints who had died? What was their fate? And how could the Lord "bring with Him" those who were already on earth? Paul takes up those questions in chapter 4:13-14 and then gives a totally new revelation, never known before. This is not written to Jews but to a Gentile local assembly, but Paul, a Jew, includes himself with the "we" of verses 15-18. We – the Church, the Christian company, comprised of Jews and Gentiles – will be "caught up ... to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."

Paul had told the Corinthians some further details about the change that will take place "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," not slowly so every eye can see it (1 Cor.15:51-53). It was a "mystery" – something not known in Old Testament times. The "appearing" of the Lord with ten thousands of His saints had even been prophesied by Enoch (Jude 14) and thus was known early in man's history. Paul also told the Philippians (3:20-21) that God would change their "bodies of humiliation" to be just like the Lord's "body of glory" (JND). The Lord had hinted this to His disciples just before the cross in John 14:1-3, that He would receive them to Himself, to be (not on earth, but) in the Father's house. But the details of what would actually happen awaited the revelation to the Thessalonians.

Just as the Lord had taught His disciples in Matthew 24, the Thessalonians already knew about the Day of the Lord – a day of about 1000 years in which the Lord directly intervenes in the affairs of men, first for judgment, then for blessing (1 Thes.5:1-2). The pre-wrathites make much of this day, as they should. It is the day when Christ will be "glorified in His saints" (2 Thes.1:10). It begins when Christ "appears" at the Mount of Olives in power and great glory. The pre-wrathites seem to feel this "discovery" somehow destroys the pre-tribulation rapture. It certainly does not!

Paul explains that mankind in general will be surprised by the Day of the Lord; in fact, man will think he has the world's solution as the revived Roman empire (western Europe) becomes a great military and political

power, with "the man" in charge who will bring warring factions together. Then Satan is cast from heaven, the abomination is set up in the Jerusalem temple, and the Great Tribulation begins (v.3). Mankind then realizes that "peace and safety" is an elusive prize.

The pre-wrathites argue that 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8 proves that the Church (as pictured by the Thessalonian assembly) will have to experience the Day of the Lord at which time the elect are gathered together and raptured so the Lord can unleash His wrath on unsaved mankind. Thus, they think, it is good to learn this so the Church will have hope that they will eventually be rescued when the Day of the Lord begins. But is that what these verses say? Not at all! It is a wonderful thing to be sons of light, to be able to understand God's prophetic plan, to know that when "Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Col.3:4) so He can be glorified in us and we can reign with Him. How great it is to know these things!

The pre-wrathites add to Scripture by making verse 9 to read, "God did not appoint us to the wrath of God, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." They also seem to quote chapter 1:10 as, "... even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath of God to come." Then they go on to argue that we will have to endure the wrath of Satan, but not the wrath of God when His feet touch the Mount of Olives. But do you see their misquotes? Take away the words "of God" in the above two verses and they are quoted correctly! What future wrath, then, are we delivered from? Every wrath, be it the wrath of man, of Satan or of God! So, now we've seen that neither the Lord's statements nor Paul's statements support the pre-wrath view, but rather the pre-tribulation view.

The Greek Word Parousia

This is the appropriate place to look at the Greek word *parousia* (#3852 Strong's) which is a compound word from *para*=with and *ousia*=being. Vine speaks of it as used for an arrival and consequent presence.

The pre-wrathites make much of the fact that this word is used in verses the pre-tribulationists use for their view of both the Rapture and the Appearing, so, indeed (they argue), the Rapture and Appearing must be speaking of the same event or at least be intimately linked in time. But the word simply means "being with." It is used of the coming of Paul (Phil.1:26; 2:12). His bodily presence was weak (2 Cor.10:10). And of the coming of other brethren too (1 Cor.16:17; 2 Cor.6-7). It is used for the coming (and continuing presence) of the Lawless one (2 Thes.2:9). It is used for the coming eternal Day of God (2 Pet.3:12). Since we will be "ever with the Lord" at the Rapture, it is not surprising it is used for that first phase of His second coming (1 Thes.2:19; 4:15; 2 Thes.2:1). And since His

appearing will have Him on earth among men and reigning with us, it is not surprising it is also used for this second phase of His second coming (Mt.24:37-39; 1 Thes.3:13; 2 Thes.2:8). So, again the pre-wrathites are in error to make parousia favor either the Rapture or the Appearing.

The Teachings of Peter (2 Peter 3)

Again we need to rightly divide or handle accurately the Word of Truth. “The heavens and the earth which are now preserved, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (ch.3:7). The fire is future. “But the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise and the elements will melt with fervent heat: both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up Looking for and hastening the coming of the Day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved ...” (vv.10-12).

The pre-wrathites see the terrible melting with fervent heat all as a part of the wrath of God right after their timing of the Rapture – part of that short time of God’s wrath on the “antichrist” and his supporters. They don’t explain how there can be a battle of Armageddon when the earth has been burned up. They simply don’t rightly divide the Word of Truth! Rather, these verses in Peter tell us that at some time during the Day of the Lord – at the end of the Millennium – the earth as we know it will be destroyed in preparation for a new heavens and a new earth (2 Pet.3:13) where righteousness dwells. We are not told where the saved of the Millennium are placed during the time of the earth’s renewal, but in changed bodies fit for eternal conditions – the day of God – anywhere would be fine. So there is nothing in Peter to support the pre-wrath position!

On to the Teachings of John in Revelation

Revelation 1:19 defines the three sections of Revelation – the things John saw, the things which are, and the things which will take place after this [or, after these things].” Chapter 1 defines the things John saw. Chapters 2-3 are things that pertain to the Church and they should be prophetic in a book of prophecy. Although more than prophetic, they indeed are prophetic of the history of the professing Church throughout the Church age which still is progressing. Thus we are still living in chapters 2-3, in “the things that are.” Where do we find the break to the things that are “after these things”? Look at Chapter 4:1, “After these things I looked and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice I heard was like a trumpet ... saying, Come up here and I will show you things which must take place after this.”

The pre-wrathites deny that this could possibly refer to the Rapture, but isn’t it then quite a series of inspired coincidences that chapter 4 begins with the exact wording that defines future events, that there is no more prophetic history of the Church, that the only other incidence of heaven opened is in connection with the coming of Christ (and His saints) to reign (Rev.19:11), that a trumpet is connected with the Rapture (1 Cor.15:52; 1 Thes.4:16), and that John is ushered into heaven to see future events both in heaven and on the earth? Who is seen in heaven? 24 elders clothed in white robes. These aren’t angels. Elders are spoken of in connection with Israel and the Church. Since Revelation is written in picture language (ch.1:1), these elders represent saved people in heaven. The only ones they could picture are those Old and New Testament saints just raptured!

It is a mistake to take Revelation 4-21 as a continuous story. The chapters constantly go back to pick up a new thread of the prophetic picture of God’s dealings with Israel and those nations involved with Israel in particular. Only chapters 17-21:8 form a continuous story from near the end of the Great Tribulation to the eternity of the future. Chapter 21:9-22:5 then take us back to the beginning of the Millennium to define in more picture detail the Church pictured as a city which reigns over the earth. The rest of chapter 22 gives warnings and encouragement to God’s people and presents a final gospel message.

We leave many of their arguments from Revelation to the suggested book, but we will study Revelation 3:10 next.

The Greek Argument in Revelation 3:10

To promote their view, the pre-wrathites must refute several portions of Scripture which give strong support to the pre-tribulational Rapture. We will only take up Revelation 3:10. I am indebted to the referenced book for help with the Greek wording. For answers to other pre-wrath “Greek” arguments, I refer you to Brainard’s book.

“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from (out of, JND) the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth.” No verse needs more reinterpreting than this one if the pre-wrathites are going to win their argument. And reinterpret it they do! They argue that the Greek actually means that the Lord will protect the Church while it is within the sphere of danger of the Tribulation wrath.

Brainard goes to great lengths to show that the above reinterpretation is wrong. “The [Greek] phrase *tereok* bears not the least notion of either protection while in a sphere of danger, or motion from inside to outside, but simply means to keep away from or keep outside of” (pg.110). None of my three Greek-English interlinears

or the many excellent translations I have allow for the reinterpretation.

The pre-wrathites evidently don't understand the prophetic aspect of the letters to the seven assemblies – that "Philadelphia" speaks of the Church in the 1800's when long lost truths, including the Rapture and the heavenly calling of the Church, were rediscovered. As the truth and practice of the Church were proclaimed worldwide, so was the promise of the soon removal of the Church before God again turned His attention to His earthly people, Israel.

The pre-wrathites assume that the perseverance mentioned in verse 10 must be the perseverance needed by the Tribulation saints. Rather, it refers to the perseverance needed in the 1800's and still today for one to "Keep My Word and not deny My name" (Rev.3:8) in a world that wants nothing to do with

Christ. They also try to limit the "hour of trial" to certain judgments and they try to limit the "over comers" to a certain elite. Brainard takes up these arguments in detail and proves their misuse of Scripture.

The last phrase in our subject verse is an interesting one. One might assume it simply means those living on the earth at that future time. I don't think so. It is used 5 more times in Revelation (6:10; 11:10; 13:8; 13:14; 17:8) and translates the Greek word katoikeo which means to settle down permanently in the evil worldsystem among evil mankind. It seems to refer to a class of people who want to settle on the earth as opposed to desiring to be with Christ. God's hour of trial, the wrath of the Tribulation, is on them.

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