

A PRE-TRIBULATION ESCAPE?

As a child and young adult I had a recurring dream. Now I know I run the risk that if I share it with you I might be psycho-analyzed and be found a little crazy. But hey, tell me something new. Anyway, at serious risk to my sanity, here goes ...

“In my visions in my head on my bed” (to quote a famous prophet that Jesus loved to quote), I used to often be chased by an individual or a lot of people who evidently were trying to dispatch me for good. Sometimes they would chase me with spears, bows and arrows, swords, or some other weapon. I could never seem to elude their hostility, and they kept gaining ground. However, at the critical moment when about to be killed, somehow I could miraculously float above my enemies and escape. The enemy could not touch me. They could shoot at me all they liked, but I was floating away, out of reach. Somehow I was up in the air. Snatched away!

In our first study titled, “When the Saints Go Marching In!” we looked at a similar dream the modern Church is having. But unlike me (I have not had that dream for many years now) the modern Church is still dreaming of the Big Escape before the

Great Tribulation (GT). We are constantly assured the Church is going to be snatched up into the air just when the Man of Sin, the Anti-Christ, the Beast who is energized by Satan himself, is about to persecute and kill us. Popular books and preachers call this pre-tribulation escape from the earth “the Rapture”. I wish to wake the Church up from this “strong delusion” so we can prepare ourselves for what’s inevitably coming (2 Thess. 2: 11).

Last week we briefly showed that the bed the Church is dreaming on is resting on a few planks that are full of white ants and about to crash through the floor into reality.

The first rotten board we explored is the idea that the Rapture is before the 7 years of the Great Tribulation. This pre-tribulation rapture is imminent and so could happen any minute now. The whole premise is that Jesus is coming secretly, quietly, any moment now, and without any sign(s) necessary before it can happen. This pre-tribulation ‘Rapture’ will be the first phase of *two* comings by Jesus: First, Jesus comes *for* the Christians before the GT, then Jesus comes *with* the saints after the GT in his visible, public, open, world-wide revelation to the nations. So runs the popular theory.

We demonstrated from the Scriptures a vital key to deliver us from this dreamy hope: *The rapture is tied to the resurrection of Christians who will be raised before the rapture can take place. There will be no rapture of the living saints until there is **first** a resurrection of all the dead in Christ (I Thess. 4: 16f). So, no pre-tribulation resurrection, means there is no pre-tribulation rapture.* We saw there is only one resurrection of the faithful saints and it always happens *after* the GT. The resurrection of the faithful dead is post-tribulation.

Today we examine the second false plank of the pre-tribulation rapture theory. This is the belief that the GT is God's wrath poured out on an unbelieving world that rejects the Gospel of Christ. Sometimes it is even called 'the pre-wrath view.'

The argument runs that God has not destined us for wrath, so how can the Church suffer *that* in the GT? Therefore God will take us out of the way via the pre-tribulation Rapture before the judgment of God on the world can begin: Christians will thus escape the wrath of God in the Great Tribulation. With all Christians thus safely snatched away to Heaven, God's wrath is then free to strike the wicked

unbelieving world.

Once again, I don't want to knock down any straw man and I want to fairly state this position. In First Thessalonians 5:9 we are taught, "For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." Earlier in First Thessalonians 1:10 we are told to, "wait for His Son from heaven, whom God raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come." We are assured the word "delivers" means "to draw or snatch out to oneself, to rescue, to save, to preserve." Greek scholar Marvin Vincent, author of *Word Studies in the New Testament*, says the verb literally means "to draw to one's self" and "almost invariably" refers to deliverance from "some evil or danger or enemy," (quoted by Rhodes, p. 88). Similarly Romans 5:9, teaches that since we are "now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." In Revelation 3:10 Christ promises the church in Philadelphia, "I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth." Ron Rhodes is representative of this pre-wrath Rapture school of thinking when he writes,

"The seven churches in Revelation 2-3 were historical churches in Asia Minor, but many

scholars believe these churches may also point in a secondary way to churches in succeeding centuries of church history. If this is correct, then Jesus may have been referring to the future rapture in Revelation 3:10.” (*The 8 Great Debates of Bible Prophecy: Understanding the Ongoing Controversies*, p.86. Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 2014.)

Rhodes continues that the definite article before the word “hour” in the Greek language is a weighty reason to think “the hour of trial” here references the specific 7-year GT, and not just any trial anytime, anywhere. Not only so, but he writes that, the phrase *caught up* in I Thess. 4:17 literally means, “snatch up or take away” and that the Greek preposition *ek* (“from”) “is used in this verse, just as it is used in Revelation 3:10. The term carries the idea of ‘separation from.’ Believers will be delivered from this wrath by being completely separated from it, which requires the rapture.” (Ibid, p. 88).

It is important in stating this pre-wrath rapture view to mention there are two other inter-connected and supporting “planks” appealed to prop up the bed on which this dreaming occurs. (I mentioned them in our first article, but just to refresh):-

No NT passage on the GT mentions the church will be involved (e.g. Matt. 13: 30,39-42,48-50; 24: 15-31; I Thess. 1:9-10; 5: 4-9; 2 Thess. 2:1-11.)

Specifically, in the book of the Revelation the word 'church' is used 19 times in the first 3 chapters but the section dealing with the GT (chaps. 14-18) never mentions the church. The church is not mentioned again until the Second Coming of Christ in chapter 19. So the church is absent from the earth during God's outpoured great wrath on the world.

Also, God rescues His people before He judges the world. Enoch was translated before the Flood, Noah and his family were in the ark before the Flood, Lot was removed from Sodom before the fire fell, the firstborn of the Hebrews in Egypt were sheltered from the Death Angel before Egypt was judged, the spies were safely out of Jericho before the walls crumbled, etc. Will not God do that for His Church before His unleashed wrath in the GT?

So there we have it. As fairly and as briefly as possible I have stated the "pre-wrath" escape view. Is it valid or convincing? Let's again see if we can find an easy key to unlock the door to clear light.

When evaluating someone's arguments and rationale it's more telling to observe what they *leave out*. I don't want to be unkind to my brothers in Christ such as our representative Mr Rhodes. But I do ask for a full presentation of all the facts. Mr Rhodes and his school omit key facts in our discussion.

I have no disagreement with his Greek word-studies, but as always the first priority in any exegesis is to get the overall context and then support that with word-study. Indeed, I have noticed in *all* presentations of the "pre-wrath" rapture view certain verses that oppose their theory are passed over without mention. Here are a few from both the OT and NT that clearly mention the "saints" of God being horribly persecuted by the Beast during the Great Tribulation ...

Daniel says the Beast in his rage will,

"Wear down the saints of the Highest One ... and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time" (Dan. 7:25).

A number of Scriptures from the NT agree with Daniel that the people of God will be persecuted in the GT:-

“For this reason, rejoice O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea; because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time. And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child” (i.e. the Jews from whom the Christ came) (Rev. 12:12f).

The next couple of verses (v. 14-16) then describe how God will miraculously keep the faithful of Israel from the Devil’s persecution. So what does the Devil then do? He turns to persecuting the Church of Christ elsewhere throughout the world ...

“And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to *make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus*” (v. 17).

The same theme of Satan’s world-wide rage against the saints continues in the next chapter ...

“And it was given to him (i.e. in context the Beast who is the final Antichrist) to *make war with the saints and to overcome them*; and authority over every tribe and people and

tongue and nation was given to him” (Rev. 13:7).

Once again the picture is of God’s faithful people, both Jewish and Gentile believers from the whole world, being horribly persecuted and killed (beheaded!) during the GT. The only ones not persecuted by the Beast are those who worship him and who receive his mark on their forehead or the back of their hand.

This GT persecution comes from the Devil, not God! According to these Scriptures it is the Devil’s wrath against the Jewish and Gentile believers for their rejection of his Antichrist and their faithfulness to God and His Christ that earns them this fiercest persecution in the GT.

In fact, while the Antichrist is busily stamping “the mark of the Beast” on his adherents, God is sealing up His servants so they won’t suffer the wrath of God when the vials of His judgements are poured out on the earth (e.g. Rev. 7:3; 9:4). The two groups in the world will be so distinct, so obviously separated. The Devil will persecute God’s people. But God will pour out His wrath on those who have “the mark”. “Here is the perseverance of the

saints” (Rev. 13:10)! Yes, there are going to be Christians here during the Great Tribulation.

Here are two chapters, (Revelation 12 & 13) written to explain the origin, nature and events of the Great Tribulation. It is Satan through the Antichrist and the False Prophet trying to crush the saints who live in the GT! Satan is enraged against those who will follow Christ to death if necessary and persecutes them because they refuse to pay him homage and worship. The Great Tribulation then is *the wrath of Satan* through the Beast, the Antichrist.

Our Master Teacher Jesus himself held this view. Jesus describes the actions of believers at the beginning, during, and after the Great Tribulation in Matt. 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21...

Jesus prophesies,

“When ***you*** see the Abomination of Desolation ...” that is, *before* the GT begins.

He continues,

“Then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. And unless those days had been cut short, no life would

have been saved; but for *the sake of the elect* those days shall be cut short. Then if anyone says *to you* ...(Matt. 24: 21-23).

Jesus believed “the elect”, the saints of God, the faithful will be in great trouble during the Great Tribulation. Then he mentions what will happen to these elect ones after the Great Tribulation ...

“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, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And he will send forth his angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together (there’s the Rapture *after* the GT!) *his elect* from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other ... For this reason *you* be ready ...”(Matt. 24: 29f).

What is this if it is not a description of “*the elect*”, *that is, believers who are there, before, during and at the very end of the Great Tribulation?* They are on

the earth, not in heaven, when they are “gathered”, i.e. raptured at the one-time “Coming” of Jesus!

Now I am aware that exponents of the “pre-wrath” rapture view try to get around these facts. They argue along two lines. First, they say these Jewish saints and the Gentile Christians have been converted by the gospel of Christ during the GT, after the first “bus” has already left the station with the Church in the pre-tribulation rapture. During the GT God is filling up the second busload. Don’t forget, we are reminded, there will be 144,000 Jewish evangelists “sealed” and protected by God as they conduct world-wide preaching missions and there will be a great revival, and it will be these newly saved believers whom Satan and the Antichrist will persecute.

It is true that in the GT there will be a significant turning to the Gospel of Christ and that many will repent and turn to God. However, we have already seen that the Church prior to the GT will not have been whisked away in the Rapture precisely because there will have been no resurrection from the dead, which always occurs when Jesus comes the Second time at the very end of the GT. So the Devil’s wrath against the church will include the whole company of those who believed before the

Man of Sin is revealed and after the GT begins, and the large numbers who will be saved during the GT. (I will address this matter in more detail in the third article in this series.)

The second line of rebuttal from the pre-tribulation escape view is to say these Scriptures which speak of saints being persecuted by the Antichrist during the GT are “Jewish”. That is, only Jewish believers are referred to and not the mixed company of the Church that God is calling now. Jesus speaks to his Jewish audience in Matthew 24, Luke 21 and Mark 13 and the GT is God’s anger against Israel for their refusal to obey the Gospel. The universal belief amongst pre-tribulation rapturists is that the GT is “Jacob’s Trouble” and not the Church’s. Thus, whole sections of Jesus and Daniel and the NT are consigned to Jews alone and not every believer in the Church of Christ.

Now, I am the first to appeal to context and the need to “rightly divide the word”. So we must ask, if Jesus does not mean Christians when he says “you” and if Jesus does not mean his Church when he calls his followers “the elect” in Matthew 24, how can we take anything he addresses to “you” as applying to us today? As my good friend Sir

Anthony Buzzard states, this sounds very much like an attempt to divorce Christians from Jesus!

When Jesus commands the disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, we have no trouble understanding he is talking to us as well. When Jesus gives the disciples the wonderful promise that he will never leave them but be with them to the very end of this Age, we have no trouble understanding the promise is for us. We are the true successors of the disciples to whom the promises and commands are given. As the inheritors of the same promises as Abraham and the twelve apostles, we inherit the very same Scriptures, surely?

The apostles certainly understood Jesus to be speaking to his Church, and not just to the Jewish believers. Their epistles and NT books assume this fact. Let me supply one clear example out of the many I could cite.

When the apostle Paul specifically deals with the question of when Christians will get their relief from tribulation he writes to comfort them with this message:

“We ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith

in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the Kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to **give relief** to you who are afflicted and to us as well **when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels** in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thess. 1:4-8).

So, in the very Thessalonian letters where "the Rapture" (or "the gathering" or "the catching up") is taught, and in the very letters where Christians are told God has "not destined us for wrath", we are told exactly *when* God will "give relief" to the suffering Church. Relief comes "**when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels.**"

This is a very telling and unambiguous text against a pre-wrath rapture, surely? There can be no doubt that Christians will get our relief from this world's persecutions and tribulations at the Revelation of Jesus when he comes again with his

mighty angels “in flaming fire” against the enemies of God. This is a *post-tribulation* relief at “the Revelation of Jesus Christ”.

The secret pre-wrath rapture will accomplish no such a thing! So, why don't the pre-wrath rapture school mention this verse and at least try to explain it for us? The unavoidable answer must be because it is so clear on a straight-forward reading as to be obviously damaging to their theory. Paul took Jesus' teaching from Matthew 24 addressed to the Twelve and said it applies equally to all Christians!

Other verses stating the same obvious truth could be cited, but space does not here allow a full treatment, but if you are interested look at Rom. 8: 18-25; 1 Pet. 1:7, 13; 4:13, as samples. These all state Christians will get their joy and glory and rewards and comfort and relief at the revelation of Christ at His Revelation at the Second Coming, and not before.

The conclusion of the matter is this: *The Great Tribulation is the Devil's wrath against the saints, both Jews and Gentiles, who obey God and follow Jesus.* The Great Tribulation of Matthew 24 is fully explained in Revelation 7: 9-17 and Revelation 13! It is the non-conformity of the saints, both

Jewish and Gentile believers to the world-system of the Antichrist which triggers his nasty persecution upon them.

It is unintelligent to confuse the Devil's persecution of the saints by the Antichrist with God's judgements upon those who worship the Beast. During the GT the followers of Jesus will be persecuted because of their devotion to Jesus. Jesus gives us the reason for the persecution of his followers, "And you shall be hated by all men for my Name's sake" (Lk. 21:17).

The Church's relief and hope is finally realised "when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels". It is only then that the entire unbelieving world will weep and wail when they see the Lamb of God coming on the clouds of heaven with great glory (Rev. 1:7).

Even so, come Lord Jesus. Meantime, please wake up O dreaming Church. Do not imagine you will be raptured away before these things burst forth. The bed you are dreaming on is sitting on rotten boards about to crash. This time there will be no floating up and away from the Great Tribulation ... that is the stuff only dreams are made of!

