

## SEVEN YEARS OF GOLDEN SILENCE!

One of the golden rules of Biblical exegesis we were taught at theological college was that “an argument from silence is no argument”. As a general principle this holds good. Just because some topic or subject is not mentioned in a particular passage of Scripture is no reason to affirm or deny it. Much better to find a passage where a matter is clearly stated and work from there. (1)

However, when it comes to teaching the pre-tribulation rapture, proponents of the theory use an argument from silence, as one of their *main* supporting planks. It's a 'biggie' for their theory.

Dr. Arnold Fruchenbaum is a Messianic Jewish believer who has written a massive volume titled *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*. Fruchtenbaum is an ardent supporter of the pre-tribulation Rapture of the Church and represents the position well. He writes that,

“Old Testament saints are not part of the Church. In the same way, the existence of saints in the Tribulation does not prove that the Church is there either, and not even once are they called the Church. The Church as such, is never

mentioned in any passage dealing with the Tribulation...This is only an argument from silence, but within the structure of the Book of Revelation it is a powerful case indeed. From the viewpoint of pure exposition, it is impossible for anyone to turn to a Tribulation passage and to show that the Church is there.” (2).

Fruchtenbaum is confident the Church is not here during the Great Tribulation because he can't find the word “church” in any passage dealing with the GT. His argument from silence is “a powerful case indeed” and represents “the viewpoint of pure exposition”. He pays lip service to it being “an argument from silence” but for Fruchtenbaum silence is golden!

Do these rather strident claims really make such a “powerful case indeed”? If true, the golden rule of Bible interpretation --- that an argument from silence is no argument --- is wide of the mark. After all, if true, one could prove virtually anything from silence. For instance, the word “church” does not appear in six (6) NT epistles -- 2 Timothy, Titus, 1 & 2 Peter, 2 John and Jude – so does this mean those letters were not written to NT Christians nor intended for us believers today? That would be a crazy deduction from silence!

Fruchtenbaum in effect has appointed himself as umpire and it's his call: "Silence! Game, set and match. Thankyou linesmen, thankyou ball boys and girls!" Trophy time. Ah, how good to be the head umpire and direct the game!

Fortunately in these days of modern technology the tennis player who feels the umpire has made a dubious line-call can call for a review. So, I wish to exercise the legitimate right to review what I hope to show is a very doubtful line-call. Let's unpack this "golden silence" argument further. (3).

Fruchtenbaum's assertion that, "Old Testament saints are not part of the Church," needs further investigating, otherwise we will be unable to see whether the Church is present during the GT or already snatched up and away from the earth before the "Big Trouble" starts.

As we saw in our last article titled, "'A Pre-Tribulation Escape", passages dealing with the Great Tribulation certainly *do* indicate that "the saints" and "the elect" are alive during the GT (Daniel, Jesus, John and Paul all give us this vital information). But according to Fruchenbaum *et al* "the saints" and "the elect" do not belong to the NT Church because the actual word "church" is not

mentioned in these passages. Significantly though, in all six of those letters just mentioned where the word 'church' does not appear, the equivalent terms 'the elect' or 'the saints' *do* appear!

It is therefore critical to the pre-tribulation 'great snatch and drive-by' theory that a sharp line of distinction be drawn between the NT saints "in this Church age of grace", and the saints of all other eras. For this theory to work, the definition of the Church must be confined (re-defined?) to believers in Christ from the Day of Pentecost until the alleged pre-GT rapture of the NT Church.

Without this dividing up of the "Church" the pre-tribulation theory falls apart as I hope to soon show. Is this "split Church personality" legitimate?

## **Terms of Equivalence**

Sometimes truth is quite simple. The word "church" (*ecclesia*) in the Greek means, "the out-called". Paul tells us, for example, who makes up "the church of God" which is at Corinth, by saying they are the ones who have "been sanctified" and who are "called saints" (I Cor. 1: 2). Here we have three synonymous terms all in the one verse ... "the church of God" (i.e. the called out ones), the "saints", and "the called". Each term is

interchangeable. Each term stands for the other and is a term of equivalence. “The elect” and “the saints” are normal collective terms for Christians throughout the New Testament!

To turn around and then say “the elect” and “the saints” just refer to Jews and tribulation believers in Revelation chapters 4 through to 18 is a purely arbitrary call. However, their game is given away when they revert to the ‘Christian’ understanding of “saints” in Revelation 22:21,

“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints” (!).

Consider this: “The Church” is not mentioned in the description of the New Heavens and the New Earth or in connection with the New Jerusalem, so will only Jews experience the New Creation?

Consistency demands this is how Fruchenbaum *et al* must reason. But they would be horrified to say this.

That the Christian Church is on earth during the GT in Revelation chapters 4 through 18 is proven by this description from Revelation 14,

“Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus” (Rev. 14:12).

No! The church consists of “the called out ones” who are “the saints” who are “the elect” who keep their faith in Jesus. It follows that since we can find these terms in passages that speak of the GT we have proved the Church is present during the GT.

Ron Rhodes also promotes the typical pre-tribulation rapture theory by alleging that passages that mention the Great Tribulation do not mention the Church of God, and *ipso facto* this silence must prove the church is not there during the GT. He writes that, “No NT passage on the tribulation mentions the church (for example, Matthew 13: 30,39-42, 48-50; 24:15-31; I Thessalonians 1:9-10; 5:4-9; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-11).” (4)

OK. I acknowledge that the English word “church” does not appear in any of these Tribulation passages. But a careful reading of these passages tell us “the saints” or “the elect” are present during the GT and we have proved these are normative terms for “the church”.

### **Until He is Taken Out of The Way?**

Take for instance 2 Thessalonians 2:1-11 which Rhodes is sure proves the church is not present during the GT because the word “church” is not

mentioned. Two verses are particularly necessary to their case ...

“And you know **what restrains** him (the final Man of Sin, the Antichrist) now, so that in his time he may be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only **he who now restrains** will do so until he is taken out of the way” (2 Thess. 2:7).

Prophecy students have long argued over the identity of “the restrainer”. Note that *what* is currently keeping the final revelation of the Man of Sin down, is also called a *he*, that is, a person. (5.)

What is relevant to our present discussion is that in recent years ‘the restrainer’ is believed to be the Third Member of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is both a neuter word and a Person, so fits nicely for the theory. And since the Holy Spirit indwells every Christian, when the church is raptured away before the GT, His restraining power through the Church in which He lives -- as the salt and the light of the world -- will be removed. So the idea is that since the Church is caught away before the GT the Spirit’s restraining influence is lifted from the nations and lawlessness is allowed free reign.

But not so fast! There are a few facts that deal a mortal blow to this interpretation. Firstly, context! Secondly, translation error!

First the context. Paul has already told us when the Church gets her relief from the persecution by the wicked. Relief comes to the Church “***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” and “***when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that Day...*** (I Thess. 1: 7-10). The Church of Christ gets her relief only at the Second Coming when Jesus is revealed in His mighty power and with heaven’s angels to judge the wicked and reward “the saints”.

Then in chapter 2 Paul explains two specific characteristics of this great Day of the Lord’s revelation to believers and unbelievers. First, it is heralded by, “ **the coming** of our Lord Jesus Christ”, at which time the Church is “**gathered together** to Him” (2 Thess. 2:1). The Coming (Greek is *Parousia*) is a favourite NT term meaning the Presence or Arrival of King Jesus. The gathering together (Greek is *episynagogeis*) is the catching up



or the rapture of the church which occurs on that great “Day of the Lord” when He arrives (v.2).

Then Paul explains to the Thessalonians they must not be troubled by any rumour that “that Day of the Lord has (already) come”. Paul says two great signs have not yet happened. Do not be deceived, he warns, because “the Rebellion (most translations say “the apostasy”) comes first, and the Man of lawlessness, the Son of Destruction” is openly “displaying” himself in arrogance against the Living God (v. 3).

Do not miss the import here. The Second Coming of our Lord and our being raptured up together to Him will not happen before the Great Rebellion and the revelation of the Man of Sin appear. This is clearly a post-tribulation rapture context and is not sign-less or imminent at any moment

Now we come to our critical verses 6 & 7 and the matter of translation. What does it mean that, “he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way” (v. 7)? Unless you can read the Greek text or have access to a lexicon (or somebody who has) this is where you are going to have to take my word for this (a dangerous practice not to check out for

yourself what anybody says!). So please check this out if you are at all able to do so.

The words “until he is taken out of the way” are *not actually in the text at all!* Repeat: The words “until he is taken out of the way” are *not actually in the text at all!* A literal reading of the phrase is, “***until he comes to be out of the midst.***” Whoa, that doesn’t even look like the same words does it? The English word “taken” is not in the original text at all! And the expression “the way” is also not in the text! But I assure you, that’s how the text should read: “***until he comes to be out of the midst.***”

What does this mean? Ah! This is referring not to the Holy Spirit in the Church (or whoever or whatever the restrainer is) being “taken out of the way” but to ***the Antichrist “who arises out of the midst”!***

If we compare Revelation 13:1f for instance, we are informed of “a beast coming up out of the sea”. The sea in the book of Revelation represents the turmoil of the nations, the international lawlessness and unrest at end of this evil age. Out of the midst of the machinations of the nations a composite beast comes forth to control and destroy. Eventually, at the head of this beastly world-empire, an individual

Man also called “the Beast” is revealed. He is energised by Satan. He speaks arrogant things (cp 2 Thess. 2: 3-4, and 9-10). He even performs miracles and signs by Satan.

So, 2 Thessalonians 2: 6-7 teaches that after the restraining power and influence is lifted by God, the Man of Sin will arise out of the midst of the turmoil of nations. Lawlessness will produce the conditions ripe for the Antichrist to come to full display.

This is the direction our international community of nations is currently moving towards at break-neck speed. I am excited as I watch it all unfolding in our daily current news and events. How close are we to the revealing of this Man of Lawless, the Antichrist? I don't know. But the more international unrest we see, the greater the breakdown of civil law and order, particularly in the Middle East and in Europe, the nearer we are to his unveiling. The bottom line for us in this study is to see that 2 Thessalonians 2 teaches no pre-tribulation rapture. Just the opposite, in fact. Before the church can be raptured the Antichrist must be revealed on the world stage.

So what about the silence our friends make so much of? Is the church absent in this tribulation

passage just because it supposedly is not mentioned? Well, remember our terms of equivalence? “The church of God” is “the saints” who are “the elect” (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:2). Certainly, the word “church” is absent from the passage, but in 2 Thess. 2 verses 13 and 14 we are told God “chose you” for salvation, and “called you” through the gospel so “that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”. There are our terms of equivalence! There is “the church” of God which is always “the called”, “the chosen”, the “sanctified” and Paul says they (we) are there in the midst of the GT and its Antichrist and his persecution of the church. This is why the apostle gives us instructions on how to recognize and face the Great Tribulation with perseverance!

### **All Saints Receive Their Perfection Together.**

Here is another simple test we can apply to this argument from silence. Do all the saints of God from all the ‘dispensations’ enter their glorious reward of salvation at the same time? Putting it in a slightly different way: Do the OT saints get their full reward at a different time and in a different place to us NT believers? After all, those who hold to the pre-tribulation theory believe the raptured NT Church enjoys the Marriage Supper of the Lamb

away in Heaven whilst the 7 years of the GT run their course on earth. “Ultra-dispensationalists” believe the NT Church remains aloof in the “heavenlies” and has nothing to do with the earthly Millennial Kingdom of Messiah when the Jews will inherit the physical and literal promises of Abraham in the Promised Land of Israel. This makes for a split Church, with two peoples, two destinies, two resurrections, two hopes, two rewards. And it necessitates *two* Second Comings (*Parousias*) to achieve the goal --- a concept taught nowhere in holy Scripture!

A definitive Scripture debunking this split Church with differing inheritances at different times is Hebrews 11: 39-40. Speaking of the great OT heroes of faith who have gained approval from God we read,

“And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that ***apart from us they should not be made perfect.***”

This much is clear then: OT believers will ***not*** be made perfect ***“apart from us”*** nor we “apart from” them. God has “provided something better” than a

piece-meal destiny for His Church. He has promised everybody who belongs to Him will be perfected together. Dead heroes of the faith who belonged to the OT Church from Hebrews 11, and NT believers in the Church of Christ, are all the Church of God and all receive the full reward of salvation *together*. No one body of believers is perfected separately. This is axiomatic.

Just a few verses later this theme is grandly stated this way,

“You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood ...” (Heb. 12: 22-24).

The teaching is this: NT believers have also become members of “the general assembly”, the original Church of God! There is only one Church when it comes to the perfection of ultimate salvation. Fruchenbaum’s incredible assertion that “Old Testament saints are not part of the Church,” is the exact opposite of this (sic). The fact is Old

Testament saints are the *original* Church into which we NT believers have become integrally connected.

The real point of difference between the two groups is one of timing: One group lived before Christ looking forward in faith to his appearance, and the other group looks back in faith to Christ.

### **The First Resurrection**

The real point of unification is also one of timing: Both the “them” who are the dead OT heroes of faith in the Church of God and the “us” of the NT era will be perfected together at the same time. Both enter the promised Kingdom inheritance simultaneously ... *at the first resurrection* ...

“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and *they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years ... this is the first resurrection*” (Rev. 20:4-6).

Please observe that this resurrection of the faithful dead --- which includes those who have been martyred for loyalty to Jesus --- is *after* they have been killed by the Beast in the Great Tribulation. Being now resurrected they sit on their thrones and begin to reign in the Messianic Kingdom. It stands to reason that if the pre-tribulation resurrection and rapture has already occurred 7 years previous to this “first resurrection” at the Second Coming, then there are two resurrections of the saints. This makes the “first resurrection” of Revelation 20: 4-6 really the second resurrection! You can’t have two firsts separated by 7 years! Impossible. The clarity of Scripture is now muddled on this pre-tribulation rapture theory.

There is One Lord Messiah who unites us all in “the church of the firstborn”. Time alone has divided both groups up until both groups who are members of the Church of God are perfected together! And that perfection happens at their moment of resurrection from the dead at the Coming of Christ. The first resurrection inaugurates the *Kingdom reign of Messiah Jesus with his Church*. We all will be perfected together at His Revelation and Coming on that Day...



“I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and *by His appearing and His kingdom*” (2 Tim. 4:1).

Christ’s appearing and Kingdom are the one glorious event. His appearing ushers in the Kingdom.

“In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me *on that Day*; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved *His appearing*” (2 Tim. 4: 8).

The Day Christ appears is the Day we enter the fullness of salvation and our rewards.

“The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (2 Tim. 4: 18).

Paul is anticipating his ultimate destination and perfection when the Kingdom arrives from Heaven. The Kingdom is “heavenly” not because it is located way up in Heaven, but because it is heavenly in origin and in nature.

“For our citizenship is in heaven, *from which also we eagerly wait for a Saviour*, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (Phil. 3:20-21).

Again note it is when our Saviour Jesus comes back from Heaven that we receive our glorified immortal bodies.

“That the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honour *at the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet. 1: 7).

“Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you *at the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet. 1: 13).

“But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing so that also *at the revelation of His glory* you may rejoice with exultation” (1 Pet. 4: 13).

“And *when the Chief Shepherd appears*, you will receive the unfading crown of glory” (1 Pet. 5:4)

Texts could be multiplied. Sufficient have been quoted to prove the Church receives her rewards and bodies of glory and enter the perfection of the Kingdom of Christ only when Christ is revealed, when He appears and is unveiled at the Day of His revealing to the world. And unless those who persist in the hope of a secret and hidden coming for the Church before the GT can prove there are two Second Comings, two “first resurrections”, two raptures of two Churches, then this novel idea that the Old Testament saints are not part of the Church and will be “made perfect” separate from and apart from us, should be dropped altogether.

Abraham “the believer” (Gal.3:6) “rejoiced to see Messiah’s day” (John 8: 56). Since Christ’s ministry on earth we too “belong to Messiah” and are Abraham’s “offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:29) and therefore, whether we are OT Church, NT Church, Jewish or Gentile believers, we “are all one in Messiah Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). OT and NT believers are “joint heirs” with Christ. All are saved by the same faith. All share in the same promise of “eternal life” which is, “the life of the Age to Come”, that is, the Kingdom of God.

If there remains any doubt let’s just turn to the end of the story. In Revelation 21 “the holy city, new

Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband". In the metaphor, the exotic celestial city just happens to have 12 gates, each inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. But on the foundations of these gates, the allegory depicts the names of the 12 apostles, which of course are associated with the NT Church. Here in the perfection there is one Church symbolised by the 12 tribes of Israel together with the 12 apostles! All are joined together and sharing "one Hope" of their calling! Any amount of fancy tap-dancing by our pre-tribulation rapturists around these clear statements is to fail to take at face value these unambiguous principles. I will leave you to decide whether our representative Fruchenbaum is correct to say, "“Old Testament saints are not part of the Church.”"

The consistent answer is that every single saint, whether already dead under the Old covenant of Israel; whether now dead during the NT age of grace; or whether yet to live or die during the GT, will be gathered up to be rewarded at the Second Coming of Jesus when He will begin to reign with universal righteousness and peace for all.

Happily, the Bible presents “one Hope” for all Bible believers of whatever era we have lived (Eph. 4: 4).

Fruchtenbaum who speaks for all pre-tribulation rapturists should no longer appeal to silence as “a powerful argument” against the Church not being here during the GT. Anybody from any era who obeys God and keeps the testimony of Jesus is a member of the Church of Christ, is a “saint”, is “called”, and will be glorified and, “made perfect” simultaneously with every believer from every era, whether OT, NT, or from the Great Tribulation on the Day Jesus comes back. So Mr Fruchtenbaum the ball is out of court and your “golden silence” call is over-ruled!

We should currently be in training and preparing for the Great Tribulation. Or does the Church prefer to lie on its bed trusting in rotten floor boards, one of which is “golden silence”? Instead of the big “snatch” get ready for the big crash! Do not be deceived. Be prepared.

1. There is one argument from silence that is however, very valid and quite telling. If the doctrine of the Trinity was believed and taught by the early apostles, where is the evidence for the furore it would have caused in the early Church? Given the first converts to Christianity were Jewish unitary monotheists whose primary tenet of faith was that the LORD God was one Yahweh, the notion that a novel Three-in-One God was now to be confessed, would have caused a massive ruckus. Given that the first Christians followed Jesus who himself confessed this primary Jewish confession (Mk 12:29f), any deviation would have created a riot. We have records in the NT of protracted debates over changes to the law of Moses and circumcision and diet restrictions to name a few. If a new doctrine of the Three-in-One God of later Church Councils had been proposed in the apostolic days, when the converts to Messiah Jesus were mainly Jews, there would have been evidence of massive discussion on the topic of so novel and revolutionary teaching. But there is not a word. Such silence is in this case deafening. Jesus and his apostles were silent on the Trinity because they never entertained the idea! This is one example where an argument from silence is valid. You may think I am running with the hares and hunting with

hounds by disallowing one argument from silence (no Church during the GT) but allowing another argument from silence concerning the Trinity (no debate on a Three-in-One Godhead in the apostolic period). However, the difference is there does emerge evidence for a post-apostolic debate on the “Godhead” and only after some hundreds of years post NT canon, which is strong evidence the Trinity was much later introduced by the Gentile Church.

2. Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Th.M., Ph.D. *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*. Ariel Ministries, San Antonio, Tx, 2003, 2004. P. 150.

3. It is not my intention in this brief article to enter the whole “ultra-dispensational” debate. I am fully aware of the arguments that Israel is the wife of Jehovah and the NT Church is the Bride of Christ, and that these bodies from different “dispensations” are totally independent and not to be confused, etc. It is clear that Fruchtenbaum *et al* who contend for the Church of Christ being taken out of the world before the GT must argue this way to justify their theory.

4. Rhodes, Ron, *The 8 Great Debates of Bible Prophecy: Understanding the Ongoing*

*Controversies*, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 2014, p. 87.

5. This brief article cannot explore all the theories as to the identity of the *what/he* currently restraining the full manifestation of the Antichrist could be. This discussion is not germane to our current topic.