

Eschatology  
The Study of End Times  
Part 4

A. Four Views of the Rapture

1. Post-Tribulation
  - a. Probably the most common because of its popularity among non-evangelical denominations
  - b. The main problem with this view is that it combines the rapture and return into a single event and can't seem to adequately explain how people with unglorified natural bodies get into the millennial kingdom
2. Mid-Tribulation:
  - a. Least popular and not a lot of adherents today
  - b. Main problem is that it allows for knowing exactly when the rapture will happen, despite Jesus saying no one knows
3. Pre-Tribulation:
  - a. The most common/popular view in evangelical circles (esp. since the Left Behind books were published in the mid 90s)
  - b. The main problem is the doctrine of imminence since the Bible prophecies at least four things that have to happen before the rapture and Day of the Lord; plus, it's contrary to the writings of the early Church fathers who believed the Church would see the abomination of desolation, the revealing of the antichrist, and face his persecution
  - c. A final problem is that it's based on the false premise that today's Church shouldn't have to face the types of suffering and persecution that 1) are found in the book of Revelation and 2) what the Church has faced for 2000 years in most of the rest of the world
4. Pre-Wrath:
  - a. Growing in popularity, especially among evangelicals and former pretribulationists
  - b. The main complaint against this view is that Jesus is the one who opens the seven seals so they must be His wrath, not Satan's or the antichrist's
  - c. Others object to this view on the basis that the word "church" doesn't occur anywhere in the book of Revelation once Jesus begins to open the seals
5. I mentioned last week that I've been finding the pre-tribulation view harder and harder to support based on my study of the Scriptures and find myself agreeing more and more with the pre-wrath view

B. Support for the Pre-wrath View

1. The seven seals in Revelation 5-8 are not the wrath of God; rather, it's the contents of the book that constitute the wrath of God (READ 5:1-10):
  - a. John sees a book and it is bound with seven seals to conceal its contents
  - b. Because He is the only One Who has "**overcome**" sin and death (5), Jesus is the only one worthy enough to remove the seals and reveal the contents of the book

- c. As we'll learn in chapters 8-16, the contents of the book are the seven trumpet judgments and seven bowl judgments which constitute the Day of the Lord and the Lord's wrath
  - d. It's not until the seven seals are removed that the contents of the book are revealed and God's wrath can then be poured out
- 2. The seals are precursors leading up to the Day of the Lord and God's wrath, and describe the consequences of the antichrist's reign and wrath on the earth:
  - a) READ 6:1-2: First Seal = The False Christ (Beast/Antichrist) begins to rule
  - b) READ 6:3-4: Second Seal = Wars (peace removed from the earth)
  - c) READ 6:5-6: Third Seal = Famine
  - d) READ 6:7-8: Fourth Seal = Death from war, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts
  - e) READ 6:9-11: Fifth Seal = Martyrdom of believers
  - f) A few things to notice:
    - 1) There's no mention of the rapture or return of Christ before these things start
    - 2) There's a natural progression: the antichrist begins to rule, which leads to war, which leads to famine, which leads to death, disease, and chaos, and even persecution of believers
    - 3) These are earthly events and the consequences of the antichrist's reign
    - 4) The fact that Jesus is opening the scrolls doesn't mean they are God's wrath, but rather that He is sovereign over all things and ultimately controls even the events that lead up to God's wrath (remember Job? God permitted Satan to afflict Job, even gave Satan permission, but God wasn't the cause of Job's suffering; Satan was)
    - 5) In fact, the fifth seal cannot be His wrath because it involves the martyrdom of believers
- 3. The sixth seal signals the arrival of the Day of the Lord and God's wrath:
  - a. When Jesus removes the sixth seal, a series of supernatural celestial signs appear (READ 6:12-14):
  - b. Both Isaiah and Joel prophesied that these signs would signal the beginning of the Day of the Lord and God's wrath (READ Isaiah 13:6-10; Joel 2:10-11, 31; 3:14-15)
  - c. Notice that when this happens, the kings of the earth immediately recognize that what's about to occur is God's wrath (RE-READ 15-17):
    - 1) This is the first mention of wrath with any of the seals which is further evidence that what's occurred up until this point is not God's wrath
    - 2) In fact, in the Olivet Discourse Jesus said they will be **"eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage"** up until this point just like in the days of Noah before the flood (Luke 17:26); would they be doing this through the first five seals if they were God's wrath?
- 4. The seventh seal begins the Day of the Lord and God's wrath (READ 8:1)
  - a. Silence is often a precursor to judgment in the Old Testament and this is what the minor prophets revealed when they warned about the Day of the Lord:
    - 1) Zephaniah 1:7: **"Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near"**
    - 2) Habakkuk 2:20: **"But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him."**
    - 3) Zechariah 2:13: **"Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD; for he is aroused from His holy habitation."**
  - b. This is precisely what we see here when Jesus removes the sixth seal:
    - 1) There are 30 minutes of silence

- 2) And immediately following the silence, we have the seven trumpet judgments followed by the seven bowl judgments which constitute the Day of the Lord and God's wrath which is described in most of the rest of the book
- c. So, God's wrath doesn't begin until Jesus removes the seventh seal
5. The pre-wrath view teaches that the rapture happens between the sixth and seventh seal—after the Great Tribulation and before the Day of the Lord/God's Wrath:
  - a. With the removal of the sixth seal we have the celestial signs and the people of earth recognizing God's wrath is about to begin, but there are three other things that occur after the six seal is broken:
    - 1) The first is the preparing of four angels to harm the earth; they are instruments of God's wrath (READ 7:1-3)
    - 2) The second is the sealing of the 144,000 Jews in order to protect them from God's wrath (mention only; 7:4-8)
    - 3) The third is John's vision of a massive uncountable number of saints standing before The Lamb of God (READ 7:9-17)
  - b. Everything about the description of these saints suggests they are the Church:
    - 1) It is an uncountable number of people from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue on Earth
    - 2) They are dressed in white robes that have been washed in the blood of the Lamb
    - 3) They are called His servants
    - 4) And, finally, Jesus is their Shepherd
  - c. Now notice what the elders say about them in v. 14: **"These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation..."**
    - 1) This is important because it matches what Jesus taught in the Olivet Discourse:
      - a) READ Matthew 24:29-31:
        - Immediately after the Great Tribulation and the celestial signs, Jesus will appear in the sky
        - The tribes of the earth will mourn
        - There will be a great trumpet blast
        - Jesus will send His angels to gather the elect (the Church) from the four winds, one end of the sky to the other
      - b) Proponents of the pre-tribulation view claim Jesus is talking about the second coming here (His return to the earth) rather than the rapture, but the context doesn't support this:
        - First, Jesus describes gathering the elect from one end of the sky to the other which is what He does at the rapture; at His second coming He returns **with** the Church because we will already be with Him
        - Second, in the parables of the fig tree in 24:32-51 He says no one will know the day or the hour when this will happen, which describes the rapture; this can't be the second coming because we know when that happens--immediately after the end of the seven years (we even know the exact number of days)

- Third, the language of one being taken and the other left in 24:40-41 is something that happens at the rapture, not the second coming :
    - Pre-trib proponents argue this is not the rapture because they are taken in judgment because those in Noah's day were "taken" in judgment, but that's a different word
    - A different word meaning to take with or alongside is used of those taken in the parables
  - Fourth, the parable of the ten virgins in 25:1-13 is symbolic of Christ coming for His Church and taking her to the wedding feast, something which happens at the rapture and before the second coming
  - Fifth, the parable of the talents in 25:14-30 is symbolic of the Judgement seat of Christ which is associated with the rapture, not the second coming
  - Sixth, Jesus actually mentions His second coming in 25:31-46; we know this refers to the second coming because it coincides with the judgment of the sheep and goats
- c) Placing the rapture between the sixth and seventh seals also matches what Paul taught in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 (READ):
- Paul is describing the rapture (the coming of Jesus and our gathering together to Him can only refer to the rapture)
  - He places it after the apostasy and the revealing of the antichrist at the abomination of desolation, both of which occur during seven years
- d) There's also another passage in Revelation that supports the rapture occurring between the sixth and seventh seal:
- It's in chapters 12-14 which is a parenthetical section which describes events that take place at non-specified times within the first six seals
  - The passage is Revelation 14:14-20 and it describes two reapings of the earth
  - Now, the first thing we have to understand before we look at this passage is something Jesus describes in Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43; it's the parable of the wheat and tares (READ both sections)
  - This is what we see depicted in Revelation 14:14-20 (READ)
  - The key to the timing of this is found in the fact that this passage is in the parenthetical section from 12-14 which describes events that take place at some non-specified time but within the six seals
- e) One last passage (IF TIME PERMITS) that I'd like to look at today is Luke 17:25-38 (READ):
- There Jesus uses the example of Lot and Noah to demonstrate that on the very same day that deliverance came for each of them, judgement started for the wicked
  - He likens that to the Day of the Lord—on the very day God raptures the Church, He will begin to pour out His wrath on the rest of the world
  - That is precisely what happens between the sixth and seventh seal

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| C. Why is all this important to us? |
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1. Whether you are pre-wrath, pre-trib, mid-trib or post-trib, Jesus warned us to be ready for His return
2. He told His disciples that when they saw the events of the Great Tribulation taking place, they should **“straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near”** (Luke 21:28)
3. Peter also wrote that are to **“look for and hasten the coming of the day of God”**; how can we do that if we are long gone before it happens? (READ 2 Peter 3:10-15)