

# SUPPOSED EVIDENCES FOR A PRETRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE

Having already given some reasons why I do not believe the Pretribulational Rapture View to be taught in the Scriptures, I will now move to deal with those supposed evidences that are used in support of that view.

This is the interpretation that I was first taught in my early days of Christianity and the one which I initially accepted. My gradual shift away from this position was not initially prompted by evidences which were presented for any alternate view, but rather because of the general lack of real evidence that I noted in a study of my own view at that time.

## **THE JEWISH NATURE OF THE FUTURE TRIBULATION**

The passages which are used to teach of a future “Great Tribulation” always describe a time of judgment when God is dealing specifically with the nation of Israel. As such, it is called “the time of Jacob’s distress” in Jeremiah 30:7. Accordingly, it is argued that the Church cannot be present on earth while God is dealing with Israel. Therefore, the Church must first be removed from the earth before this future period of tribulation can begin.

I have stated elsewhere that I am not convinced that there must necessarily be such a future period of tribulation. There have already been, not merely one, but two such periods when nations moved against the nation of Israel so that the temple was desecrated by an invading “anti-Christ.”

The objection raised under this point is really an objection based upon the theological system known as Dispensationalism. It is a system which holds that God has two different plans and programs and people through whom He works and that He shall always keep them separate and distinct. It is supposed that He cannot be working with Israel while He is also working with the church.

This objection is removed when we examine the book of Acts. All of the events and the growth of the Church which are recorded in the books of Acts took place while the nation of Israel was still in existence. In fact, certain passages in Acts seem to show that the Kingdom was still being offered to the Jews during the first years of the Church (Acts 3:19-26; 28:20-31). Thus, we have an excellent example of God dealing with the Church and Israel at the same time.

## **THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH**

The Church is the Body and the Bride of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18). It is the object of His infinite love and the recipient of every spiritual blessing. The believer finds himself in union with Christ.

If the Church is to go into or through such a time of future tribulation, she will be subjected to the wrath and judgments which will characterize that period. Thus, the Church cannot go into the Tribulation, since she has been delivered from judgment (Romans 8:1; John 5:24).

The problem with this argument is that there have been many instances in history when the Church has gone through terrible persecutions and tribulations. To say that Christ would not permit His Bride to go through this time of trouble is inconsistent with history.

At the same time, I would submit that just because the Church goes through tribulation, it would not necessarily follow that the judgments and indignations of such tribulation would be directed at her, any more than the plagues against Egypt meant that God was judging the Israelites in the days of the Exodus.

## **THE CHURCH IS TO BE DELIVERED FROM THE WRATH TO COME**

Twice during the Epistle to the Thessalonians Paul states that believers are to be delivered from wrath. This fact is used by Pretribulationists to teach that the church must be “raptured away” before that wrath can take place.

*For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception it had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who DELIVERS US FROM THE WRATH TO COME. (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).*

*For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:9).*

We need to make several observations from these two passages. First of all, notice that neither of these passages tell us specifically to what this “wrath” refers. Neither make reference to a period of seven years and neither speak of something that must necessarily take place prior to the Second Coming of Christ.

The word “wrath” is translated from the Greek word *orge* which is found 35 other times in the New Testament. When describing the anger of God, it is often seen as describing the judgment of Hell (Matthew 3:7; Luke 3:7), the wrath which is seen on the unbeliever in general (John 3:36; Romans 1:18), as well as the day of coming judgment which takes place when Christ returns (Revelation 6:16-17; 11:18; 19:15).

An unbiased reading of this passage in its context would lead most people to think that this was a reference to the deliverance from the eternal condemnation that shall take place when Christ returns in the judgment of His Second Coming.

Finally we should note that this deliverance does not look to the future but to the present. 1 Thessalonians 1:9 states that Jesus delivers us from the wrath to come. Notice the tense that is utilized. The wrath is in the future (it is to come), but the deliverance is present. The believer is delivered today from God’s wrath at the very moment when he places his faith in Jesus Christ.

## **KEPT FROM THE HOUR OF TESTING**

In Revelation 3:10, the church in Philadelphia is given a special promise — that they would be kept from the hour of testing which was about to come upon the whole world. The Pretribulationist sees this as a promise to take the church out of the earth before the coming of the Tribulation.

*Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth. (Revelation 3:10).*

The phrase “I also will keep you from the hour” is translated from a Greek phrase which carries the idea of safely guarding one so that he can escape. It is therefore maintained that God will safely guard the Church out of a future period of tribulation rather than allowing her to go through it.

Now I want to ask you a question. If this verse is a reference to this future tribulation, then what is it actually saying? That only the church at Philadelphia is going to be taken off the earth in the Rapture before the coming of the Tribulation? Or does it mean that only those believers who have kept the word of His perseverance will take part in the Rapture — that there will only be a partial Rapture of believers?

I do not think so. In fact, I do not think that this is a reference to a future period of tribulation at all. Instead, I would suggest that this is a promise to that specific church in

Asia Minor that would be delivered from the great persecutions which were soon to come upon the whole world and which did come during the early years of the church. Indeed, the promise was fulfilled, for church history relates that the church in Philadelphia not only survived that hour of testing, but also that it remained a constant in that city for over a thousand years.

Furthermore, this specific Greek phrase that is used to describe how Jesus *will keep you from* (the Greek phrase is τηρησω εκ) *the hour of temptation* is also found in John 17:15 where Jesus prays, *I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from* (τηρησω εκ) *the evil one*. This phrase very obviously does not necessitate a removal of believers from the earth, but rather is described by Jesus as a “protecting in place.”

## **THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

This is an argument from silence. It takes note of that fact that the Church is not mentioned in Revelation 6-19 which is said to deal with the a time of future tribulation. What is usually overlooked is the fact that the Church is also not mentioned in Revelation 20-22, an area in which all agree that the Church is present.

If one wishes to argue that the primary focus of Revelation 6-19 is upon the nation of Israel, I am inclined to agree. But this in no way necessitates the removal of the church.

## **REVELATION 4-5: THE CHURCH IN HEAVEN DURING THE TRIBULATION**

Revelation 4-5 begins with John being caught up in the Spirit into Heaven. This is seen to be a type of the Rapture of the Church. While in Heaven, he sees 24 elders (4:4) around the throne of God, accompanied by a host of angels (5:11). These 24 elders are said to represent the Church which is Raptured and taken to Heaven before the beginning of the Tribulation which is then related in Revelation 6-19.

However, John was not “Raptured.” He was given no resurrection body as will be the case in the Rapture (1 Corinthians 15:51-53). Instead, we are told that he was “*in the spirit*” (Revelation 4:2).

Furthermore, the presence of 24 elders around the throne would point to a Jewish presence as opposed to a presence that was exclusively the church and apart from Israel. The 24 elders correspond to the 24 courses in which the priests were organized. The language of Revelation 4-5 is TEMPLE language. It points to a gathering of all of God’s

people from every age.

## **THE CONCEPT OF THE CHURCH AS A MYSTERY**

It is maintained by Dispensationalists that the New Testament presents the Church as a mystery that was never before revealed in the Old Testament. On the other hand, the Tribulation is said to be described in great detail in the Old Testament. This line of reasoning is sometimes used to indicate that the Church could not enter the Tribulation.

This type of logic is invalid. Just because the Church is not mentioned in the Old Testament does not mean that the Church cannot exist within a period or in a place which is described therein. If this were the case, then by the same line of reasoning, we would have to say that the Church cannot exist during the Kingdom, since this is also described in great detail in the Old Testament.

## **THE REMOVAL OF THE RESTRAINER**

2 Thessalonians 2:7-8 describes the work of the Holy Spirit in restraining the purposes of Satan. At the proper time, this restrainer will be taken out of the way.

*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.*

*And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming. (2 Thessalonians 2:7-8).*

The Pretribulationist sees this as an evidence of all of the believers being taken off the earth before the revealing of a future anti-Christ. Since the Holy Spirit indwells all believers and since the Holy Spirit will be removed, then it logically follows that all believers must also be removed.

The problem with this line of reasoning is that it reads into the passage something that is not there. The passage is not saying that the Holy Spirit will ever cease to be omnipresent. It is merely saying that there comes a time when the Spirit's work of restraining lawlessness ceases and when God allows men to go their own way.

## **THE IMMINENT RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST**

The Pretribulationist contends that the Scriptures teach that Christ could return at any moment — that no sign or promise remains to be fulfilled before He returns to gather His saints.

In this particular case, I tend to agree with the Pretribulationist. Christ could indeed return at any moment in His Second Coming. It could be today. Or it could be a thousand years from now.

A number of passages are normally presented to support this teaching of an imminent return of Christ.

*When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:4).*

*So that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>s</sup> who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:7-8).*

*Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. (Titus 2:13).*

*You too be patient, strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (James 5:8).*

Do these passage specifically state that Christ could come back at any moment? Perhaps not. What they do teach is that we are looking forward to the coming of the Lord. This is true for all believers, whether they think that the Rapture will take place before, in the middle of, or after some future tribulation.

This same sort of language is seen in 2 Peter 3:13 which declares that we look for new heaven and a new earth. If these passages do teach of an imminent return of Christ, then we must of necessity also hold that 2 Peter 3:13 teaches of an imminent destruction of heaven and earth and entry into the eternal state. I personally concur, but that must remain the subject of a different paper.

## **CHRIST'S COMING FOR HIS SAINTS IS DISTINCT FROM HIS COMING WITH HIS SAINTS**

It is maintained by the Pretribulationist that Christ is going to come back twice; the first time as He comes FOR His saints and the second time as He returns WITH His saints.

But do the Scriptures actually keep such a distinction?

Remember that the “Rapture” is to be descriptive of Jesus coming back only FOR His saints. Yet we read the following in a Passage that the Pretribulationist regards as testifying to this separate “Rapture”:

*For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring **with** Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 4:14).*

By the same token, how can it be denied that a passage that describes the Lord coming and gathering together *His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other* is a coming FOR those very elected ones? The language of Matthew 24:30-31 is admitted by the Pretribulationist to describe the Second Coming of Christ and yet obviously pictures Him coming FOR those who are alive and remain upon the earth.

The truth is that the return of Christ involves BOTH a coming for His saints as well as a coming with His saints. Those who have already died in the Lord shall come **with** Him while those who are alive and remain shall find that Jesus comes **for** them.

## **CHRIST WILL COME THE FIRST TIME ONLY IN THE AIR AND NOT TO THE EARTH**

Pretribulationism points to 1 Thessalonians 4 and insists that it is a separate coming of Christ that only involves His coming in the air as opposed to coming all the way to planet earth.

*For the Lord Himself **will descend from heaven** with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord **in the air**, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).*

However we read this and ask, if Christ “descends from heaven,” then where exactly could he be expected to “descend” to - other than the physical realm of the earth?

Yet Pretribulationism insists that this does not amount to a return of Christ. It is claimed, “He does not come to the earth, but this is a meeting in the air. From there He takes the church to the Father’s house where He has been and He does not come to earth at this time.”

The problem with such a statement is that many of the passages used by the Pretribulationist to describe the Second Coming also speak of Christ coming in the clouds.

*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, <sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matthew 24:29-31).*

Although the Pretribulationist accepts this passage as the Second Coming, it makes no mention of Christ coming to the earth or setting foot upon the earth. To the contrary, it states only that Christ is coming on the clouds of the sky even though the Pretribulationist admits that this coming culminates with a landing on planet earth.

Neither is this an isolated instance. In Revelation 19 we read of a glorious vision of Christ returning on a white horse with the armies of heaven following, but nowhere do we read that he actually sets foot upon the earth.

We must therefore conclude that the Scriptures do not make a distinction between a coming in which there is a landing on planet earth as opposed to a separate and distinct coming that only has the clouds of the sky as its arena.

## **THE RAPTURE IS SECRET WHILE THE SECOND COMING IS PUBLIC**

It is argued that the “rapture” is a secret even while the second coming is public. Revelation 1:7 says that “He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him.” What is not so clear is that the “rapture” is secret. To the contrary, it is said to come...

- With a shout.
- With the voice of the archangel.
- With the trumpet of God.

This is not a secret coming; it is a very loud coming. On the other hand, it is true that the coming of the Lord will be like a thief. This does not mean it will be secret, but it does

mean that it will be unexpected.

*But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. (Matthew 24:43).*

*For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3).*

*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. (2 Peter 3:10).*

Paul speaks in 2 Thessalonians 1 of Christians who are being afflicted and how God will “give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire.”

## **THE EPISTLES ARE NOT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PREACHING OF THE APOSTLES**

Some scholars, clearly embarrassed by the lack of clear teaching in the Bible of a Pretribulational Rapture, have suggested that perhaps the epistles are not representative of the normal preaching and teaching of the apostles. They would contend that the reason that none of the writers of the New Testament set forth a Pretribulational Rapture is because everyone had already been taught this and there was no need to further explain it.

This is just too much of an assumption on which to base a doctrine. The teaching of the Second Coming and of the Rapture are found all throughout the New Testament again and again. The idea of a Pretribulational Rapture stands out by nature of its total lack of Scriptural support.

Thus, an in-depth examination of the evidences used to support the Pre-tribulation Rapture position shows us that these essential arguments will not stand up to a literal interpretation of the Scriptures. We are forced to the conclusion that the Bible does NOT promise a Pretribulational Rapture.