

The Rapture - Part 35

© 2015 Andy Woods

My previous articles commenced a series on the rapture of the church. We began with the question, "What is the Rapture?" This question can best be answered by noting ten truths about the rapture from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. We then moved to a second main question, namely, when will the rapture take place relative to the coming seven-year Tribulation period? We offered the contention that believers can develop certainty that they will be raptured before the Tribulation period occurs for at least seven reasons. After dealing with these two questions, we began to explore some of the weaknesses associated with the other competing views that seek to answer the question, "When Will the Rapture Take Place Relative to the Coming Tribulation Period?" At least five differing perspectives exist. We noted at the onset that it is important to understand that all of the non-pretribulation positions have a difficult time handling the seven arguments favoring **pre-tribulationism** previously discussed in this series. Beyond this, we have already noted the problems associated with **mid-tribulationism** and **post-tribulationism**, and **partial rapturism**. In the last and this article, we briefly explain and analyze **pre-wrath rapturism**.

Pre-Wrath Rapturism

Pre-wrath rapturists maintain that the rapture will occur roughly twenty-one months into the second half of the Tribulation period. The present brief critique will focus on only *seven* general problems with the pre-wrath rapture view. In the prior installment we noted two problems with the Pre-wrath rapture view. 1. The pre-wrath rapture view places the church, a distinct spiritual organism, into Daniel's Seventieth Week, which is a time period when God will be exclusively dealing with national Israel (Dan. 9:24). 2. The pre-wrath rapture of the church denies the imminent return of Christ. Let us now explore *three* more problems with the Pre-wrath rapture position.

Third, pre-wrath rapturism denies the comfort that the rapture is designed to bring to the believer. As noted earlier in this series, the New Testament frequently mentions comfort when the rapture is presented (John 14:1; 1 Thess. 4:18; Titus 2:13). As noted previously, this notion of comfort harmonizes well with the pretribulation rapture position, which teaches that the church will be kept out of Daniel's Seventieth Week entirely. However, where is the comfort in pre-wrath rapturism? How can the biblical passages related to comfort be honestly

harmonized with a belief that says before experiencing the hope of the rapture, the church must first endure the diabolical reign of the Antichrist, wars and rumors of war, famine, pestilence, the death of a quarter of the world's population, wide-scale martyrdom, and unprecedented cosmic disturbances (Rev. 6:1-8)?

Fourth, pre-wrath rapturism imposes an artificial and unnatural construct upon Daniel's Seventieth Week (Dan. 9:27). This important passage says:

And he will make a firm covenant with the many for *one week*, but in the *middle of the week* he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of *abominations will come one who makes desolate*, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate (italics added).

Any intellectually honest reading of this important prophecy will see that it will encompass a seven-year period comprised of two equal three-and-one-half year periods. The eschatological event demarcating these halves from one another will be the Antichrist's desecration of the Temple at the Tribulation's midpoint. The Book of Revelation builds upon this foundation by simply adding details. Revelation focuses on the different halves of the seven-year Tribulation period by calling the reader's attention to them

through the use of various synonyms. Such synonyms include "forty-two months" (Rev. 11:2; 13:5), "one thousand two hundred and sixty days" (Rev. 12:6), and a "times time and half a time" (Dan. 12:7; Rev. 11:3; 12:14). These are all different ways of saying "three and one-half years." Regarding the latter expression, a "time" is a Jewish year. The plurality of "time" or "times" represents two Jewish years. "A half a time" comprises half of a Jewish year. When these various parts are added together, the sum of the parts is a three-and-one-half year time period.

The pre-wrath rapture view ignores this basic two-part structure by imposing a three-part or tri-pirate concept upon Daniel's Seventieth Week. As mentioned in the last article, according to pre-wrath rapturism, the first half of Daniel's Seventieth Week will be the "beginning of sorrows." The second part will be the "Great Tribulation" and will last an additional twenty-one months beyond the Tribulation's midpoint. The third part will constitute the "Day of the Lord" and will comprise the final twenty one months of Daniel's Seventieth Week. This alleged tripartite structure is foreign and artificially imposed upon Daniel 9:27. This three part structure is also a notion that is not honored or referenced by any other New Testament writer who comments upon or adds clarifying details to Daniel 9:27. The emphasis of Daniel 9:27 and all subsequent biblical commentary is a two-

part structure rather than the imagined three-part structure that is erroneously taught by pre-wrath rapturism.

Fifth, pre-wrath rapturism is problematic in that it confines the wrath of God to the final quarter of the Tribulation period and fails to recognize that the entire Seventieth Week of Daniel actually represents God's wrath. For example, of the future Tribulation period, Zephaniah 1:14-15 says:

Near is the great day of the LORD, near and coming very quickly; Listen, the day of the LORD! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. A day of wrath is that day, a day of trouble and distress, a day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness (italics added).

Interestingly, the Hebrew word *tsarah* translated "trouble" here is also translated by the LXX (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament created nearly two centuries before the time of Christ) with the Greek word *thlipis*, or "tribulation." Thus, far from separating divine wrath or the Day of the Lord from the preceding Great Tribulation as is maintained by pre-wrath rapture advocates, notice that Zephaniah 1:14-15 indicates that the Day of the Lord constitutes *both* a time of divine wrath and tribulation.

In addition, it is lexical and grammatically difficult, if not impossible, to embrace the

argument advanced by the pre-wrath rapturist that the actual wrath of the Lamb does not really begin until the opening of the sixth seal judgment (Rev. 6:12-17). Revelation 6:16-17 says, "and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'" (Italics added). Regarding these verses, Thomas explains:

The verb *elethen* ("has come") is aorist indicative, referring to a previous arrival of wrath, not something that is about to take place. Men see the arrival of this day at least as early as the cosmic upheavals that characterize the sixth seal (6:12-14), but upon reflection they probably recognize that it was already in effect with the death of one-fourth of the population (6:7-8), the worldwide famine (6:5-6), and the global warfare (6:3-4). The rapid sequence of all of these events could not escape notice, but the light of their true explanation does not dawn upon human consciousness until the severe phenomena of the sixth seal arrive.¹

¹ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary*, ed. Kenneth Barker (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 457-58.

Also without merit is the pre-wrath contention that the wrath of God is absent from the first five seal judgments merely on the grounds that the actual word "wrath" is not found in the verses describing these judgments (Rev. 6:1-11). Geisler appropriately observes, "Absence of a word does not prove absence of the concept. For example, the word *wrath* does not appear in Genesis, yet God's wrath was poured out during the flood (6-8) and on Sodom and Gomorrah (19)."²

If the first five seal judgments do not represent the wrath of God, then what exactly do they represent? According to pre-wrath rapturism, they represent the wrath of man and Satan rather than God's wrath. Yet, how can this be when Jesus is portrayed in heaven as opening the seven-sealed scroll (Rev. 5:7; 6:1), which brings forth the various seal judgments, including the first five seal judgments? If Jesus opening of the seals brings forth these judgments, then they simply cannot be categorized as the wrath of man and Satan and not the wrath of God. While it remains true that human activity is the cause of many of these first five seal judgments, human activity alone is not their ultimate cause. The ultimate cause of these judgments is the Lamb's heavenly activity of opening the seven-sealed scroll.

The first of these five judgments is none other than the advent of the Antichrist himself (Rev. 6:1-2). While the Antichrist along with his satanic empowerment brings judgment to the earth, it is Christ opening of the first seal from heaven that will allow the Antichrist to come forth in the first place. This should come as no great surprise to diligent Bible readers since God often uses human instruments to execute His judgment. The Old Testament depicts the Arameans (Isa. 9:11-12), Assyrians (Isa. 10:5-6), and Persians (Isa. 13:3, 5, 9, 17-19) all as instruments of God's "indignation," "anger," or "wrath" against a sinful people. The New Testament similarly depicts the agents of human government as an instrument of His wrath. Romans 13:4 says, "For it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of **God**, an avenger who brings **wrath** on the one who practices evil" (italics added). If God frequently uses human instruments to execute His wrath, then why cannot the Antichrist of the first seal judgment (Rev. 6:1-2) also not be understood as an agent of divine wrath? Paul seems to indicate as much regarding the future Antichrist when he states, "*that is, the **one whose coming** is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders...For this reason **God will send upon them a deluding***"

² Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 4 vols. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 2004), 4:652.

influence so that they will believe what is false" (2 Thess. 2:9-11; italics added).

Interestingly, the second and third seal judgments will bring forth war (Rev. 6:3-4) and famine (Rev. 6:5-6) respectively. The Old Testament also routinely describes these realities as instruments of God's wrath (2 Chron. 36:15-17; Isa. 51:19-20; Jer. 21:5-7, 9; 44:8, 11-12; 50:13, 25; Ezek. 7:14-15). If this is so, then consistency seems to dictate that the warfare and famine of the second and third seal judgments should also be categorized as God's wrath.

In addition, the fourth seal judgment will bring about the death of one-fourth of the world's population (Rev. 6:7-8) and the fifth seal judgment will introduce wide spread martyrdoms (Rev. 9-11). Pre-wrath rapturists see these judgments involving massive deaths as mere acts of man or the devil. However, it remains interpretively significant to connect these judgments involving death to a statement made at the beginning of the Book of Revelation that God is the one who is in control of death. Revelation 1:18 says, "...I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."³ Since God's sovereignty over death is clearly proclaimed at the beginning of Revelation, we should understand massive deaths as portrayed later on in the book as within His sovereignty and part of His

judgments and not as mere acts of Satan and man only as is taught by pre-wrath rapturists. In sum, all of these preceding points cumulatively demonstrate that it is highly problematic to interpret the first five seal judgments as devoid of God's wrath. Yet, interpreting them in such an innocuous manner is a key ingredient of the pre-wrath rapture position.

(To Be Continued...)



Source: SpiritAndTruth.org

³ See also Deuteronomy 32:39.