

The Rapture - Part 36

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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 raptureism**. In this article, we will briefly explain and analyze **pre-wrath raptureism**.

Pre-Wrath Raptureism

Pre-wrath raptureists 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 installments we noted five 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.
3. Pre-wrath raptureism denies the comfort that the rapture is designed to bring to the believer.
4. Pre-wrath raptureism imposes an artificial and unnatural construct upon Daniel's Seventieth Week (Dan. 9:27).
5. Pre-wrath raptureism 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.

Let us now explore *two* more problems with the Pre-wrath rapture position.

Sixth, while the pre-wrath rapture labels the first half of the second half of the Tribulation period (from the forty-second to the sixty-third month) as "the Great Tribulation," Christ's prophecy concerning the Great Tribulation would necessitate it being even greater than the Day of the Lord or the final quarter of Daniel's Seventieth Week. Regarding the Great Tribulation, Jesus predicted, "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will" (Matthew 24:21). Jesus clearly indicates here that the Great Tribulation will be characterized by an unprecedented and unequalled time of distress. Yet, how can this statement fit the pre-wrath rapture scenario of events, which outlines a time period following the Great Tribulation known as the Day of the Lord when God's very wrath will be poured out? In other words, how can the Great Tribulation period, a time without God's wrath, be even greater than the subsequent Day of the Lord, when the very wrath of God will be manifested? Zeller explains:

The PRE-WRATH view teaches that the Day of the Lord begins after the Great Tribulation and that the Day of the Lord is the time of God's

wrath. Matthew 24:21, Daniel 12:1 and Jeremiah 30:7 all teach that the Great Tribulation is the greatest time of trouble that the world has ever known. Therefore, if the Day of the Lord is distinct from the Great Tribulation, then the Day of the Lord must be LESS SEVERE than the Great Tribulation. But how can the great day of God's wrath be less severe and less troublesome than the Great Tribulation? How can God's wrath be less severe than man's wrath? How can the trumpets and bowls be less severe than the fifth seal? How can God's wrath be less severe than Satan's wrath? How can unregenerate men and Satan cause more trouble for this world than the wrathful JUDGE Himself? The PRE-WRATH view, when compared with Matthew 24:21 and these other verses, makes the Day of the Lord an ANTICLIMAX!¹

Seventh, the pre-wrath interpretation that the restrainer (2 Thess. 2:6-7) represents Michael the Archangel is problematic. As noted earlier, pre-wrath rapture advocates contend that Michael will step aside from his function of restraining the Antichrist during the Great Tribulation. However, as noted earlier in this series,² the problem with identifying Michael as the restrainer

¹ Zeller, "Pre-Wrath Confusion," 7-8.

² See part 17 of this series.

is that Jude 9 tells us that Michael is reluctant to contest Satan, when it says, "But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" Therefore, consistency seems to dictate that Michael would also be unwilling to actively contribute to the present restraining of the satanically controlled Antichrist.

In addition, it is unlikely that Michael is the restrainer since the restrainer holds back the Antichrist from making his global debut (2 Thess. 2:6-7) while Michael is more focused on protecting national Israel (Dan. 12:1). Furthermore, how could the restrainer, who at some point stops restraining (2 Thess. 2:6-7), be Michael since Michael never stops protecting Israel? Thus, Kessinger concludes, "The pre-wrath view holds to the rather inventive idea that Michael the archangel is the restrainer. This concept fails to take into consideration Michael's special protective ministry toward Israel."³

Moreover, as noted earlier in this series,⁴ the best interpretive option is that the restrainer mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 is the Holy Spirit rather than Michael the Archangel. There are two primary reasons for reaching this conclusion. First,

the force restraining the Antichrist must be more powerful than Satan. According to 2 Thessalonians 2:9, the Antichrist will be Satan's masterpiece who will be directly controlled and empowered by Satan himself. Thus, the restrainer must be powerful enough to prevent Satan from unleashing the Antichrist onto the world scene until the proper time. Only deity possessing the attribute of omnipotence ("all power") has unlimited power. Certainly the Holy Spirit meets this criterion since He is full deity (Acts 5:3-4).

Second, the Greek participle "restrainer" is neuter in 2 Thessalonians 2:6 and masculine in verse 7. Identifying the restrainer as the Holy Spirit handles well this abrupt transition from the neuter to the masculine gender. The Greek word for Spirit is *pneuma*, which is a neuter noun. Moreover, in the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus identified the Holy Spirit with the masculine personal pronoun "him" or "he." For example, in John 14:17, Christ said, "that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you." The Holy Spirit is designated by the personal pronoun "he" in other sections of the same discourse (John 15:26; 16:13-14). Thus, in contradistinction to pre-wrath rapture theology, while identification of the restrainer as Michael is problematic, identifying the restrainer as the Holy Spirit represents the best interpretive option.

³ Kessinger, 294.

⁴ Ibid.

In conclusion, the following *seven* reasons cumulatively make the novel and recent pre-wrath rapture interpretation suspect.

1. It inserts the church into Israel's Seventieth Week of Daniel (Dan. 9:24, 27).
2. It denies imminence of the rapture.
3. It fails to harmonize with the biblical teaching that the rapture is a comfort (John 14:1).
4. It imposes an artificial three-part structure onto Daniel's two-part Seventieth Week.
5. It fails to comprehend that the whole Seventieth Week (Dan. 9:27) is a time of divine wrath.
6. It fails to harmonize with Christ's prediction (Matt. 24:21) that the Great Tribulation is even greater than the subsequent Day of the Lord in the pre-wrath rapture order of events.
7. Finally, the view awkwardly identifies the restrainer (2 Thess. 2:6-7) as Michael the Archangel.

In sum, in this series, having previously answered the question, "What is the Rapture?" we noted at least *seven* reasons that affirm the pre-tribulational rapture view. We then began interacting with the other positions on the timing of the rapture. In prior articles, we have answered **mid-tribulationism, post-tribulationism, and partial rapturism**. In

this article we have explained the **pre-wrath rapture** theory as well as the various reasons as to why it is deficient and therefore should be rejected.

What will occur in the twinkling of an eye—a mere nanosecond—actually requires careful study in order to properly understand the rapture in its dispensationally correct place in God's future program. In depth study is also needed to correctly apply this doctrine. Such was the purpose of this extended series.

(End of Series...)



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