

## Week 3

– Prophetic Vision  
and the Rapture of the  
church.

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## Preliminary Considerations

In session 1 we stated that Prophetic Perspective could be summarized as - *What a Prophet sees is often a "mountain peak" in time. The base of the mountain is unseen and, while another mountain may be visible beyond the first, the terrain between the mountains is obscured.* The Rapture of the church is just such a mountain valley not fully seen in the Prophetic view. Matthew 24 and the book of Revelation DO NOT SPECIFICALLY TEACH THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH. It is only through piecing together other passages of Scripture that we glimpse the valley in the eschatological vista and understand the reality of Christ's removal of the church. Because we must piece this doctrine together from several other teachings it is what, is often called in theological circles, a *construct* as opposed to a fundamental doctrine. Because the Rapture is a construct there are interpretive disagreements which create differing conclusions. The Rapture of the church should not be used as a separation of fellowship.

We will divide this topic into two sessions:

- The first will explore the various theories of the Rapture
- The second will explore the texts which support the Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the church.

## What is the Rapture?

The Rapture is the removal of the church to be with Christ in Heaven. Most specifically spelled out in I Thessalonians 4:13-18, it is also in view in I Corinthians 15. In this event Jesus Christ returns with a trumpet blast, the dead rise then the believers join Christ in the air. These are the matters agreed upon by among all evangelicals. The matter in question is timing. The functions of that timing are the Millennium and the Tribulation.

## The Millennium

Defined: The Millennium is the 1000 year reign of Christ foretold in Revelation 20 when Satan is bound and the earth is under the authority of Christ. While we will discuss this matter more when we discuss Daniel and when we reach Revelation 20 we must briefly define the various methods of viewing this 1000 years to identify the Rapture.

## Key Passages of Scripture

### ***Daniel 2:34-35, NIV***

*"While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth."*

<sup>1</sup>

### ***Daniel 2:44-45, NIV***

*"In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. "The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy.""*

<sup>2</sup>

### ***Revelation 20:1-6, NIV***

*" And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years."*

<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984. Zondervan: Grand Rapids

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984. Zondervan: Grand Rapids

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## Theories of the Millennium

**POST-MILLENNIALISM** – The word POST indicates this theory points to after the Millennium. The interpretation of the Millennium states that Christ will return after the 1000 years to establish the new heaven and the new earth.

### KEYS TO THE INTERPRETATION ARE:

- The church is the Kingdom of Christ
- The 1000 years begins some time after the church's influence takes hold of society
- Over the 1000 years the church gains control of society and will "hand over" control of the earth to Christ.
- The 1000 years are a statement of a long, undetermined time but not necessarily 1000 years.
- The Removal of the church in I Thessalonians is merely the greeting of the returning Christ.
- The struggles foretold in Matthew 24 and Revelation are the historic struggle of Israel in a.d.65-70 and the growth of the church.

### SOME TENETS OF POST-MILLENNIALISM

- The world is getting better and better.
- Peace on earth is a possibility when Christianity is Universal.
- Unbelievers will one day submit to OT laws (Theonomy).
- Protests and Demonstrations will lead to the restoration of morality (Restoration Theology).
- The Nation of Israel is not necessary for the future of the world and God's redemptive work.

### FAMOUS POST MILLENNIALISTS

Martin Luther  
Woodrow Wilson  
Rouses Rushdooney  
Gary North

Jay Adams  
Randal Terry  
Westminster Seminary

**A-MILLENNIALISM** – The A signifies there is no Millennium. A-Millennialists believe the 1000 years of Revelation 20 is a figure for the lengthy reign of the church. The foundation of this theory (and to some extent the figurative approach that Post-Millennialism embraces) arises from the fact that 1000 is the largest number in the Greek language and is often used figuratively. However, it is not always used figuratively and usually takes a different form when it is.

### **THE KEYS OF A-MILLENNIALISM INTERPRETATION, ARE:**

- The church is the Kingdom of Christ
- The 1000 years begins with the resurrection of Christ and continues for an undetermined period of time until his return.
- The church will grow and receive all of the promises ascribed to OT Israel and fill the whole earth.
- The 1000 years are a statement of a long, undetermined time but not necessarily 1000 years. There is no distinction between the church and Israel.
- The Removal of the church in I Thessalonians is merely the greeting of the returning Christ.
- The struggles foretold in Matthew 24 and Revelation are the historic struggle and growth of the church.

### **KEY TENETS OF A-MILLENNIALISM**

- The church and Israel are synonymous
- The church must fill the earth before Christ returns
- The church will experience struggles but must prevail

### **FAMOUS A-MILLENNIALISTS**

John Calvin  
Charles Spurgeon  
Francis Schaeffer  
James Kennedy  
Westminster Seminary  
Harold Camping

**PREMILLENNIALISM** – The prefix Pre- means before so Premillennialism believes that Christ must return before the 1000 years and will then establish his kingdom.

**THE KEYS OF PREMILLENNIALISM INTERPRETATION, ARE:**

- The millennium is a literal 1000 years
- The Kingdom is a specific earthly reign of Christ.
- While the church may grow and become substantial, it plays little in the establishment of the Kingdom
- Christ’s return in I Thessalonians is for his church and takes place at an unknown time.

**KEY TENETS OF PREMILLENNIALISM**

The Kingdom of Christ is a literal 1000 years

The Kingdom is NOT the church

A period of Tribulation or persecution must precede the establishment of the Kingdom

While not universal, many believe Israel and the church are distinct.

**FAMOUS PREMILLENNIALISTS**

Charles Darby

Charles Ryrie

Now that we have defined the Rapture by the Return of Christ we must further define it by the wrath of God poured out on the earth known as the Great Tribulation.

**The Tribulation Positions**

Only Premillennialism is further classified by the Great Tribulation. The Premillennial approach to Scripture asserts that the Great Tribulation culminates the time of the Gentiles. Other views of the millennium view the Great Tribulation as a historic event – usually the Roman war against the Jews in a.d.65-70. At issue here is the removal of the church in reference to the beginning of Christ’s Kingdom. If the church is the Kingdom, as the other interpretations hold, then the removal of the church is a moot point.

## Key Passages of Scripture

### *Daniel 9:25-27, NIV*

*“Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.”*

<sup>4</sup>

## POST TRIBULATION-ISM

The church must go through the Great Tribulation and witness to every nation tribe and tongue that Christ is coming. The Position is divided between Historic Post Tribulation-ism and Classic Post Tribulation-ism.

## THE KEYS OF HISTORIC POST TRIBULATION-ISM INTERPRETATION, ARE:

- The church has weathered the Great Tribulation and the next great event on God’s calendar is the rapture of the church.
- The church is synonymous with Israel

## KEY TENETS OF HISTORIC POST TRIBULATION-ISM

- The Great Tribulation is a literal time, but it corresponds with the Jewish War.
- Matthew 24 describes the Jewish War and is directed at the church in Israel not Israel in the end times.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. 1996, c1984. Zondervan: Grand Rapids

- I Thessalonians describes a rapture where believers immediately return to the earth for the millennium.

## **FAMOUS HISTORIC POST TRIBULATIONISTS**

J Barton Payne  
Biblical Seminary  
Wheaton College

## **CLASSIC POST TRIBULATION-ISM**

The classic position asserts that a day of tribulation (a literal 7 years )lies ahead prior to the return of Christ. While some believe this turmoil will include the tribulation of the church (hence, Matthew 24 is addressed to believers and the church) the prevailing opinion (Ladd) is that God will bring the church through the Tribulation and preserve them from his wrath here on earth similar to the preservation of Israel in Egypt during the plagues.

## **THE KEYS OF CLASSIC POST TRIBULATION-ISM INTERPRETATION, ARE:**

- The church will weather the Great Tribulation
- The church is synonymous with Israel

## **KEY TENETS OF CLASSIC POST TRIBULATION-ISM**

- The Great Tribulation is a literal time in the church's future.
- Matthew 24 describes the Great Tribulation and is directed at the church not Israel in the end times.
- God will preserve the Church though it will definitely experience some suffering as it has through the ages
- I Thessalonians describes a rapture where believers immediately return to the earth for the millennium.

## **FAMOUS CLASSIC POST TRIBULATIONISTS**

George Eldon Ladd  
Fuller Theological Seminary

## MID TRIBULATIONISM

Since Daniel 9 divides the last week (the Great Tribulation) into two equal parts then we are to understand that the Rapture of the church will occur in that division. Mid-Tribulationism has experienced a renaissance through the work of Marv Rosenthal – former editor of *Israel My Glory* magazine and creator of *Bibletown* in Orlando, FL.

### THE KEYS OF MID TRIBULATION-ISM INTERPRETATION, ARE:

- The Tribulation is segmented in Daniel 9 therefore there are two distinct parts of the tribulation pointing to the point of the Rapture.
- Since the Rapture is to occur with the trumpet call of God I Thessalonians 4:16 and the *last trumpet* I Corinthians 15:52 we should equate these with the 7 trumpets of Revelation 10:7 when the last of the 7 trumpets is sounded and *the mystery of God is accomplished*
- The church will remain through the first 3 ½ years of the Tribulation during the time when God renews his work with Israel, but will be removed before God pours out his wrath on evil.
- We could be in the first three and a half years now, but the sign this time has truly begun is the construction of a new temple in Jerusalem

### KEY TENETS OF HISTORIC POST TRIBULATION-ISM

- The Great Tribulation is a literal time in the future
- Matthew 24 Israel in the end times.
- I Thessalonians describes a rapture where believers return to the earth for the millennium.
- For Rosenthal the Mid Trib approach signifies a revival among Jews and their incorporation in the church prior to God's wrath. In this way God preserves a remnant.

### FAMOUS HISTORIC POST TRIBULATIONISTS

Norman Harrison  
Marv Rosenthal  
Gleason Archer

## **PRE-TRIBULATION-ISM**

The Pre-Trib position asserts that the Tribulation is not designed for the church and therefore, the church will not pass through the 7 years of God's wrath.

### **THE KEYS OF PRE-TRIBULATION-ISM INTERPRETATION, ARE:**

- God has not appointed the church to wrath so the church will be removed from Great Tribulation
- Israel is a distinct entity from the church and the Great Tribulation is a return to God's work with Israel.

### **KEY TENETS OF PRE-TRIBULATION-ISM**

- The Great Tribulation is a literal time
- Israel is distinct from the church
- God has not appointed the church to wrath
- Matthew 24 the Great Tribulation in Israel in the end times.
- I Thessalonians describes a rapture where believers spend seven years with Jesus awaiting the fullness of God's wrath.

### **FAMOUS PRE-TRIBULATIONISTS**

John Walvoord

Gordon McRae

Dallas Theological Seminary