

Week 4

- Prophetic Vision and the Rapture of the church (cont.)

Introduction

In our last session we discussed the many viewpoints of the return of Christ – the crowning moment of the Eschaton. In this week's session we want to review 4 arguments, from Scripture, that support a Pre-Millennial, Pre-Tribulational Rapture. I am indebted to Dr. Paul Feinberg of Trinity Seminary, Deerfield, IL for the structure of these arguments.

Matters NOT in Dispute (among Pre-Millennialists)

The Rapture will occur and is defined by Scripture.

Here we all agree. Paul specifically defines the Rapture of the church in 1 Thessalonians when he says:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (NIV)

¹³ Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. ¹⁴ We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Several principles come out of this passage

1. The return of the Lord includes a removal of the saints.
2. The dead in Christ receive priority in their physical resurrection.
3. The removal of the saints is
 - a. Physical
 - b. Extra-terrestrial
 - c. Permanent

The Wrath of God is not for the church to experience

Without question, the church will be tested and persecuted, experiencing the wrath of men, but never God's judgment upon all of the earth for unbelief as the Scripture so clearly state will happen.

It is important for us to identify that the following arguments are simply that – arguments. While I believe them to be cogent, thorough and convincing arguments, they do not rise to the level of unwavering doctrine. True believers do embrace other interpretations and have their own strong arguments supporting their opinions. Scripture is filled with clear doctrine like the virgin birth and the authority and inerrancy of Scripture. These arguments do not rise to that level.

Scripture Arguments for a Pre-Tribulation Rapture

Argument 1 – God's wrath

Key Texts		
1 Thessalonians 1:10 (NIV) and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath .	1 Thessalonians 5:9 (NIV) For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.	Revelation 3:10 (NIV) Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.
Romans 5:9 (NIV) Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!	Ephesians 5:6 (NIV) Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient .	Colossians 3:6 (NIV) Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

These texts appear to point to the Tribulation as the specific time of God's wrath because

The general context is the Second Coming of Christ

The future context indicated by the word "Coming"

The relationship between the texts, particularly 1 Thes. 1:10 and 5:9

A thumbnail outline of 1 Thessalonians might look something like this:

The “end times” concerns of the believers is baseless vv. 1-2

Isaiah 2:12 (NIV)

The LORD Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty, for all that is exalted (and they will be humbled),

Amos 5:18 (NIV)

Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light.

Matthew 24:8 (NIV)

All these are the beginning of birth pains.

The believer has no fear where the unbeliever must fear vv. 4-5

The believer must use his light to change the unbeliever vv.6-8

God’s Wrath in the book of Revelation

Can we define God’s wrath in the book of Revelation – the book which seems to flesh out Daniel’s 70th week more than any other source? The words for wrath (there are two) appear 16 times in the book. Four of those uses are significant because they assign time structure and help us identify the time of the rapture because they assign the time of God’s wrath.

Revelation 6:16-17 (NIV)

¹⁶ *They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! ¹⁷ For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”*

The key words of this verse are the words; “has come” and come during the seal judgments – the first judgments of the Tribulation. The word is a Greek Aorist tense which *could* carry the idea of a point of inception (Robert Gundry), but more likely reflect the acknowledgement of the unbeliever that God’s promised judgment is upon them.

A second text with a similar construction is:

Revelation 11:18 (NIV)

¹⁸ *The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great— and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”*

Since this text comes after the seventh trumpet in the middle of Daniel's week the mid-tribulation advocate envisions the beginning of the wrath of God and justifies their removal of the church at this time. More likely the statement, since it follows the previous construction, is an aorist of constancy – the continuation of God's wrath.

Finally,

Revelation 15:1 (NIV)

¹ I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed.

God's wrath is "finished." Most would see this statement as the completion of all the plagues or judgments, not just the last seven.

If the church is saved from God's wrath and the judgments of the Tribulation are God's wrath then the church is saved from (raptured) the Tribulation.

Argument 2 – The necessity of an interval

The second argument is an argument about time. If God removes the church and they immediately return with glorified bodies who then will populate the earth during the Millennium in such a way as to need sacrifice reproduce and bring about the prophesied rebellion of Rev. 20? The second argument for a Pre-Tribulation Rapture states that an interval in which additional saints repent and come to Christ must logically exist to accommodate the described events and actions of the millennium.

Here are some of the events of the Millennial Kingdom in Question

These passages point to the re-establishment of sacrifice in recognition of sin

Isaiah 19:21 (NIV)

²¹ So the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the LORD. They will worship with sacrifices and grain offerings; they will make vows to the LORD and keep them.

Ezekiel 43:13-27 (NIV)

¹³ “These are the measurements of the altar in long cubits, that cubit being a cubit and a handbreadth: Its gutter is a cubit deep and a cubit wide, with a rim of one span around the edge. And this is the height of the altar: ¹⁴ From the gutter on the ground up to the lower ledge it is two cubits high and a cubit wide, and from the smaller ledge up to the larger ledge it is four cubits high and a cubit wide. ¹⁵ The altar hearth is four cubits high, and four horns project upward from the hearth. ¹⁶ The altar hearth is square, twelve cubits long and twelve cubits wide. ¹⁷ The upper ledge also is square, fourteen cubits long and fourteen cubits wide, with a rim of half a cubit and a gutter of a cubit all around. The steps of the altar face east.” ¹⁸ Then he said to me, “Son of man, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: These will be the regulations for sacrificing burnt offerings and sprinkling blood upon the altar when it is built: ¹⁹ You are to give a young bull as a sin offering to the priests, who are Levites, of the family of Zadok, who come near to minister before me, declares the Sovereign LORD. ²⁰ You are to take some of its blood and put it on the four horns of the altar and on the four corners of the upper ledge and all around the rim, and so purify the altar and make atonement for it. ²¹ You are to take the bull for the sin offering and burn it in the designated part of the temple area outside the sanctuary. ²² “On the second day you are to offer a male goat without defect for a sin offering, and the altar is to be purified as it was purified with the bull. ²³ When you have finished purifying it, you are to offer a young bull and a ram from the flock, both without defect. ²⁴ You are to offer them before the LORD, and the priests are to sprinkle salt on them and sacrifice them as a burnt offering to the LORD. ²⁵ “For seven days you are to provide a male goat daily for a sin offering; you are also to provide a young bull and a ram from the flock, both without defect. ²⁶ For seven days they are to make atonement for the altar and cleanse it; thus they will dedicate it. ²⁷ At the end of these days, from the eighth day on, the priests are to present your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings on the altar. Then I will accept you, declares the Sovereign LORD.”

Revelation 20:7-10 identify a rebellion against God

Revelation 20:7-10 (NIV)

⁷ When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. ⁹ They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰ And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

There will be sickness and death

Isaiah 65:20 (NIV)

²⁰ "Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed.

There will be development of housing and vineyards

Isaiah 65:21-22 (NIV)

²¹ They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands.

In contrast to these, the rapture of the church will bring about glorified bodies

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (NIV)

⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

... and evil ones will not enter the Kingdom

Matthew 25:31-46 (NIV)

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. ³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ ³⁷ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ ⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’ ⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ ⁴⁴ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ ⁴⁵ “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ ⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Logically, then, there is a need of an interval of some kind between the removal of the church and the establishment of the Kingdom. Pre-Tribulationism best answers that need.

Argument 3 – Distinctions between Rapture and Second coming passages.

Rapture Texts	Second Coming Texts
John 14:1-14	Zechariah 14:1-21
1 Corinthians 15:51-58	Matthew 24:29-31
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18	Mark 13:24-27
	Luke 21:25-27
	Revelation 19

Comparing the texts yield Omissions and Inconsistencies

Omissions

All Second coming texts include signs and events signaling the return of Christ; **No** Rapture text contains a single sign.

Matthew 24:33 (NIV)

³³ *Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.*

Second Coming Passages ALWAYS appear in the context of great tribulation.

Matthew 24:21 (NIV)

²¹ *For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.*

Second Coming passages NEVER refer to the Rapture. If the Mid's and Posties were right wouldn't you expect to see some statement about the church being caught away?

Second Coming passages omit any references to the translation of the church or the resurrection of the church, or, for that matter, the church (The last time the church is mentioned in the book of Revelation is in chapter 3)

Second Coming passages detail great physical changes to the earth at the Second Advent missing from rapture passages

Zechariah 14:4 (NIV)

4 On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.

Inconsistencies

The resurrection of the dead. – Rapture passages detail the resurrection of the church during Christ's descent and prior to the living. SC passages detail descent, judgment, then resurrection.

Where are we going? – John 14:3 says we are going to heaven. A Post-Tribulation understanding has us returning to earth.

Argument 4 – The Nature of the Church in the World

2 Thessalonians 2:1-8 (NIV)

¹ Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. ³ Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. ⁴ He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵ Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? ⁶ And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. ⁷ For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.

This passage contains two statements worth reviewing because they are often interpreted – not translated.

The restraint of evil

Verse 6 states that some matter is restraining evil in the world and that the end will not come about until that restraint is removed. Many have interpreted that restraint as the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when the Holy Spirit is removed the AntiChrist can take control and will rule the world. If the Holy Spirit is removed can anyone be saved? If people repent during the tribulation, or have the offer to do so, then the Holy Spirit must be present and the restraint removed in 2 Thessalonians CANNOT be the Holy Spirit.

It can be, within the context, the church. If this is the case then the church (a workof the Holy Spirit) is the retraining force keeping the world from spinning to the depths of sin and the subjection of the world to the wrath that God will pour out.

The meaning of the word “rebellion”

The word used in vs. 3 is the word we transliterate “apostasy” – a word we use for rebellion, particularly from the truth of Christ. There are no other uses of this word in the New Testament and Greek uses are highly limited. The word itself is a compound of two Greek words

Apo – meaning “from”
and

Stasis – meaning “standing”

Some have taken the meaning of the word as “standing away from” or “in opposition to” and the word could mean that. But with a lack of history the word may mean to “distinguish” or “remove.”

If the first meaning is assigned to the text then there is a pre-cursor to the Rapture of the church – a rebellion in which the AntiChrist is revealed. The second meaning would say the “removal” must occur prior to the Tribulation. The first meaning would limit the comfort desired by the text to don’t sound the alarm yet, but get ready to sound it. While the second comforts the believer by saying there is no need to panic because we will not see the end. The latter interpretation seems more in keeping with the intent of the text.