

The Case for Post-Tribulationism

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KEY WORDS

| Day of the Lord | Imminency | Rapture |
| Second Coming | Olivet Discourse | Great Tribulation |

ABSTRACT

This article surveys the merits for post-tribulationism in contrast to pre-tribulationism or the pre-wrath view, advocating post-tribulationism as the most compelling. It explores several of the principal questions around which the debate has centred, many of which revolve around the exegetical viability of separating the rapture from the Parousia by a period of divine wrath. Post-tribulationist advocates are not convinced that there exists a gap of time between these two events, characterized by divine wrath. There are theological tensions in both camps, however it is the position of this article that as the various biblical passages that relate to the rapture are viewed through the lens of post-tribulationism that these theological tensions are reasonably resolved.

INTRODUCTION

The ἄρπάζω transliterated *harpazō* (Koine Greek) or *rapio* (Latin) translates into the English word rapture, which denotes a forcible *catching up* of the church to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess 4:17), and is one of the most seemingly unbelievable concepts in the entire Bible. When first encountering such a concept it seems to belong more to the genre of science fiction or fantasy. Yet not only is this idea awe inspiring, it is also fully rooted in Scripture. The concept of the rapture is unquestionably biblical and scholars on all sides of the debate particularly pre-millennial scholars certainly believe in its future occurrence, in the same way they believe in the Second Coming itself.¹

Those advocating amillennialism or post-millennialism generally understand the rapture to be synonymous with the Second Coming,

and therefore the emphasis is not so much concerned with the rapture of the church but with the resurrection and uniting of God's people to Christ.² One of the main questions dividing pre-millennial scholars is concerning the timing of the rapture, i.e. whether the rapture occurs prior to the great tribulation, prior to the wrath of God being outpoured, or after the great tribulation but immediately prior to the Second Coming. This premillennial eschatology is built on a futurist reading of Daniel the Olivet Discourse and Revelation, which it is maintained all describe the final seven years of this age as being dominated by Antichrist i.e. the

¹ Premillennialists hold that Jesus will establish a temporary earthly kingdom i.e. the millennium upon his return at the Second Coming, this accords with a plain interpretation of Revelation 20:1-6.

² Amillennialists do not generally believe that Christ will set up his rule on the earth, but rather that Christ simply comes, judges, and establishes the new heaven and earth. Post-millennialists believe that the world will become godlier more peaceful and prosperous through the preaching and teaching of the church, and that the age to come will be like the present with the church ruling for a period of time. At the end Christ returns and judges the world and like the amillennialists the rapture is therefore synonymous with the Second Coming.

seventieth week of Daniel.³ 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is the only NT passage where the teaching of the rapture is explicitly taught, however the rapture is implicit in both 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 and John 14:2. The doctrine of the rapture rests on these three NT passages, and through which the rapture is seen to be intricately connected to the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the Second Coming. However a number of other relevant NT passages which although ultimately are less conclusive, nevertheless contribute to and enrich the discussion notably Matthew 24:31; 2 Thessalonians 1:10; Revelation 14:14-16.⁴ Additionally, there are OT allusions to the rapture e.g. Dan 12:2 and also *types* of rapture e.g. Enoch in Genesis 5:24.

This article will firstly overview the seventieth week of Daniel, the reason being because whether surveying post-tribulationism pre-tribulationism or the pre-wrath view, much if not all of the argumentation revolves around the seventieth week of Daniel.⁵ For the

pre-tribulationist advocate the entire seventieth week is synonymous with the Day of the Lord. The pre-wrath view argues for a rapture during the second half of Daniel's seventieth week, and post-tribulationism argues for a rapture at the climax of Daniel's seventieth week simultaneous with the Parousia. Understanding Daniel's seventieth week from a futurist interpretative approach is therefore essential, in order to fully appreciate the three theological positions of post-tribulationism, pre-tribulationism and pre-wrath. Moreover, many conservative scholars such as Craig Blaising regard the prophecy of the seventy weeks of Daniel as quite compelling, advocating that the first sixty-nine weeks are already accurately fulfilled, John Walvoord also shared this conviction.⁶ If this is the case a futurist reading of Daniel 9:24-27 lends much credence to pre-millennialism, as amillennialists and post-millennialists generally treat OT prophecies less literally than pre-millennialists.⁷ Secondly this article explains the recent rise of pre-tribulationism. Thirdly the NT passages which explicitly or implicitly underpin the doctrine of the rapture are surveyed. The following passages will also be surveyed through the lens of post-tribulationism: Matthew 24:3, 15, 31, 34, 40-41, 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; John 14:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; and Revelation 1:19, 3:10, 7:14, 11:11-12, 20:4-5.

makes desolate (Matt 24:15) and according to conservative scholars the Second Advent of Christ. The seventieth week of Daniel is the final 7 years of the total 490 years which make up Daniel's seventy weeks, i.e. each week is a 7 year period of time. A futurist interpretation of this seventieth week postulates a gap of time between the end of the 69th week which culminated with Christ's first advent, and the beginning of the 70th week leading to Christ's Second Advent.

6 Walvoord, John F. (1944) *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Volume: BSAC 101:401. Is the Seventieth Week of Daniel Future? pp. 30-31. Blaising, Craig A. (2012) *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Volume: BSAC 169:674. The Day Of The Lord And The Seventieth Week Of Daniel. pp .135-142.

7 Walvoord, P.30-31.

3 A distinction is made by pre-wrath advocates between the general eschatological conditions which characterise the church age (Matt 24:4-14), and the divine wrath of God poured out in the eschatological Day of the Lord, signalled by the Danielic abomination of desolation. Pre-wrath advocates believe that prior to and during the first half of Daniel's seventieth week, these general eschatological conditions will worsen. Such worsening conditions are exemplified by wars, rumours of wars, and gentile kings and governments increasingly persecuting Christians. However, pre-wrath proponents distinguish between these general eschatological conditions, and the divine outpouring of wrath as depicted by the Day of the Lord language. Futurist advocates believe everything from Revelation ch.6 onwards is future in contrast to being directed to the audience of John's day, which would be a preterist interpretation. A historicist approach interprets everything chronologically from John's day to the Parousia, in contrast to the idealist approach which avoids assigning specific referents to John's visionary symbols.

4 Gundry, Stanley N. Hultberg, Alan. 2010. *Three Views on the Rapture Pretribulation, Prewrath, or Posttribulation*. Introduction. Alan Hultberg. pp .11-13. Grand Rapids, Michigan. Zondervan.

5 The seventieth week of Daniel is a prophecy given to Daniel by the angel Gabriel as seen in Daniel 9:24-27. The scope of the prophecy spans the time from the decree given by Artaxerxes I (Longimanus) issued to Nehemiah in 444BC in the month of Nisan, to the abomination that

DANIEL'S SEVENTY WEEKS – DANIEL 9:24-27

The seventy weeks of Daniel prophesied in Daniel 9:24-27 is the *sine qua non* to understanding the broad theological framework, or context, which pre-tribulationists formulate their interpretations against. Since many post-tribulationists hold to the same interpretation of Daniel's seventy weeks as pre-tribulationists and pre-wrath proponents, only an overview will be given here.

The two main divisions of interpreting Daniel 9:24-27 are Christological and non-Christological. The Christological approach generally interprets either the scope of the Danielic prophecy i.e. Daniel 9:24-27 as culminating in Christ, or only the first sixty-nine weeks of Daniel 9:24-26 as culminating in Christ. Most conservatives within the evangelical camp hold to the Messianic view, though today some evangelicals are also rejecting the Messianic interpretation.⁸ Within the non-Christological view there is the traditional Orthodox Jewish interpretation and the liberal critical view, both of which are non-Messianic.⁹ A non-Christological interpretation finds fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy in events either before or after Christ. For example, parts or all of the prophecy finding fulfilment in the events leading up to the persecution carried out by Antiochus Epiphanes (164-168 B.C.),

8 For example, John Goldingay rejects the messianic interpretation in the Word Biblical Commentary, and Thomas McComiskey in a prominent Christian journal. Tanner, Paul J. (2009) *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Volume: BSAC 166:663. Is Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 2. p. 320.

9 Despite this, there are ancient Jewish sources written before the earliest Christian sources which posit a messianic interpretation, as seen through chronologies referring to some prophetic passages, including Daniel's seventy weeks. Tanner, Paul J. (2009) *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Volume: BSAC 166:662. Is Daniel's Seventy-Weeks Prophecy Messianic? Part 1. pp. 82-183.

resulting in the Maccabean revolt.¹⁰ Or as many orthodox Jews maintain, the prophecy finding its climax in the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD70.¹¹ Non-Christological adherents can therefore generally be divided along the line of those which represent a liberal critical view, Orthodox Jewish or those with a conservative amillennial view. The former two either posit that Daniel was not a product of the 6th century B.C., but rather the 2nd century B.C., or assign figures within their chronology of Daniel's seventy weeks which are unacceptable to modern historians.¹² The latter do not interpret the units of time in Daniel 9:24-27 literally, but rather figuratively.¹³ Two major weaknesses exist within the non-Christological perspective, based upon the presumption that the beginning of the seventy weeks begun with the Jeremianic prophecy, and not the command to restore Jerusalem. Therefore, insofar as Daniel's seventy weeks culminating in Antiochus Epiphanes (164-168 B.C.), this necessitates that Jeremiah was incorrect (Jeremiah 25:11-12, 29:10), and secondly therefore that Daniel was in error, (Daniel 9:24-25). This would render the Christological view not worthy of consideration, even though there are credible reasons given for a literal interpretation of segments if not all of this prophecy.¹⁴ It is therefore the intention of

10 Walvoord, pp. 32-33.

11 Walvoord, p. 36.

12 Tanner, (Part 1). pp. 184-185.

13 SPELIOPOULOS ELKE B. 2009. THE 70 WEEKS OF DANIEL: A SURVEY OF THE INTERPRETIVE VIEWS. On-line available from, http://www.academia.edu/506098/The_70_Weeks_of_Daniel_-_Survey_of_the_Interpretive_Views, Accessed on 12/04/15. Tanner, (Part 1). P.182-185. Tanner, (Part 2). P.334.

14 There was unanimous agreement between virtually all the early church fathers, as well as Jewish scholars that each of Daniel's weeks was equal to a period of seven years. Additionally, nearly all these scholars interpreted the first sixty-nine weeks, if not the entirety of Daniel's seventy week prophecy as culminating in Christ's first advent. This Messianic view is also predominant throughout church history, though the chronological details and calculations of these scholars did vary widely. Walvoord, P.33-34.

this article to explore and defend further only the Messianic interpretation of Daniel.

MESSIANIC INTERPRETATION OF DANIEL'S SEVENTY WEEKS

Within premillennial theology the first sixty-nine weeks culminated in Christ, and the great tribulation in the eschatological future takes place during the seventieth week of Daniel. Daniel's seventieth week according to a futurist reading of Daniel 9:27 is the final seven year period of this current age, culminating with the Second Coming.¹⁵ This interpretation begs the question "Why is there a gap between the 69th and 70th week?" Or put another way between the first coming of Christ, and the future tribulation and the Second Coming of Christ at least two-thousand years later?

Scholars have understood the gap period as allowing for the two different aspects of Christ's coming, as prophesied in the OT. By the close of the 69th week the Messiah had presented himself to his covenant people for the first time, however unbeknown to the Jewish people there would be two comings not one.¹⁶ On this first occasion Christ would come into Jerusalem riding on a donkey fulfilling his role as the priestly Suffering Servant, though at the time of his Second Coming he will fulfil his prophesied role of conquering King.¹⁷ Additional examples

to support the gap will follow below.

There are other passages in Scripture which clearly intend a significant gap of time which the original reader may not have realised, but which contemporary readers now know. This view is therefore completely tenable with Scripture hermeneutically. A passage of scripture which evidently implies a gap of time between two prophesied events within the same verse, or passage, is known as prophetic compression.¹⁸ The following passages exemplifying prophetic compression do not all evidence the same event or duration of time, or gap, but they suffice to illustrate that a gap is intended. For example an interval of time is also seen in Zechariah 9:9-10, in v9 the Messiah is prophesied to enter Jerusalem on a donkey and in v10 can be seen to be ruling over the nations. Again in Isaiah 9:6-7 the same principle is seen, in 9.6 Messiah is born a child and in 9.7 can be seen to be ruling on David's throne over the earth. Another verse illustrating this hermeneutical feature is Isaiah 61:1-2. Jesus himself quotes from Isaiah 61:1-2a as seen in Luke 4:18-19, but stops at the comma and does not actually quote Isaiah 61:2b. In Isaiah 61:1-2a Christ spoke of the signs accompanying his Messianic ministry, but he does not quote Isaiah 61:2b which prophesies the day of vengeance of our God. Those signs accompanying Christ's Messianic ministry included: good news being preached to the poor; his binding up of the

15 Walvoord, P.31-36.

16 Story, Cullen I. K. (1948) *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Volume: BSAC 105:418. What Kind of Messiah Did the Jews Expect? pp. 238-239.

17 The Jewish rabbis in their confusion over the two contrary descriptions of the Messiah presented in the OT even speculated the possibility of two Messiahs, one being named Messiah ben Joseph who would be a Messiah of grace and mercy and the other a Messiah of righteous rule of law named Messiah ben David. This idea is found in Gemara, Sukkah 52a-b. Mitchell, David C. RABBI DOSA AND THE RABBIS DIFFER: MESSIAH BEN JOSEPH IN THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD. On-line available from, <http://home.scarlet.be/~tsf07148/theo/Mes.b.Joseph%20>

[in%20Talmud.pdf](http://www.jewishroots.net/library/prophecy/daniel/daniel-9-24-27/gap-in-between-69-and-70.html), Accessed on 01/03/15. However, not all scholars agree that Jewish rabbis speculated as to the possibility of two Messiahs, but rather that it is a creation of modern scholars. Hurst, L. D. (1999) *Bulletin for Biblical Research*. Volume: BBR 09:1. Did Qumran Expect Two Messiahs? pp. 157-180. On another point, during this intervening time between the two separate comings of the Messiah the message of the Gospel would go out to the nations.

18 Jewish Roots. 2003-2015. Old Testament Prophecy: A Gap of Time In-Between Week 69 and Week 70. On-line available from, <http://jewishroots.net/library/prophecy/daniel/daniel-9-24-27/gap-in-between-69-and-70.html>, Accessed on 01/01/15.

broken hearted; his proclaiming liberty to captives; and of his proclaiming the favourable year of the Lord. These signs are all described in Isaiah 61:1-2a, this is the point at which Christ halted in his speech mid-sentence. The reason that Christ stopped at the comma is because the day of vengeance describes the activity of his Second Coming, while the part of the passage he read from in Isaiah described his first advent, the activities of which were presently being fulfilled.¹⁹ Prophetic compression is therefore clearly evident in Daniel 9:26-27. So when we read in Daniel 9:26 that Messiah is cut off it seems reasonable to conclude that the natural sequence in the weeks has been interrupted, and the prophetic clock has stopped, leaving one seven-year period to be completed in the eschatological future, as prophesied in Daniel 9:27.²⁰

This leads us to a discussion of the nature of Daniel's final "week", or seven-year period. Pre-tribulationists believe this whole seven year period to be synonymous with the great tribulation, whereas pre-wrath advocates believe the great tribulation to take place during the final 3 ½ years of this seventieth week or seven year period. Pre-wrath advocates do not believe the rapture occurs in the middle of the tribulation, but rather that it occurs specifically before the wrath of God is outpoured on the earth. Pre-wrath advocates distinguish a difference between the general eschatological conditions characteristic of the church age (Matt 24:4-14), and the eschatological Day of the Lord signalled by the Danielic abomination of desolation.²¹ The pre-wrath view proponents believe these general eschatological conditions will worsen prior to and during the first part of Daniel's seventieth

week. Examples of such worsening conditions include wars, rumours of wars, and persecution of Christians by gentile kings and governments. However, they maintain a distinction between these general eschatological conditions, and the divine outpouring of wrath as depicted by the Day of the Lord language. Conversely some post-tribulationists believe the final seventieth week of Daniel as mentioned in Daniel 9:27, is actually the entire inter-advent age, i.e. the time between Christ's first and Second Coming.²² My view is that the seventieth week of Daniel is yet future, and equates to a seven calendar year period of time prior to the Parousia. According to standard premillennial eschatological thinking this final seven year period is when the Antichrist will dominate the earth, and this period will begin when he makes a covenant with Israel (Dan 9:27). This current age or dispensation, sometimes referred to as the church age, is not mentioned in Daniel 9:24-27, notwithstanding such a long period of time that has elapsed between the historical events described in Daniel 9:26 prior to the events of v27 in the eschatological future. So far the time that has elapsed between Daniel 9:26 and v27 is over two-thousand years, and still growing. This gap in excess of two-thousand years is therefore implied between v26 and v27 of Daniel 9, between the cutting off of the Messiah (v.25-26), and the future appearance of Antichrist in the eschatological future (v.27). Therefore a Messianic interpretation of the first sixty-nine weeks of Daniel 9:24-26, concluding with Christ's appearance as the *Messiah the Prince* in v26, and the subsequent diaspora, makes it consistent and fitting that the final seventieth week will have a similar futurist fulfilment.²³ This futurist approach to understanding Daniel's

19 Walvoord, P.47-49.

20 Jewish Roots.

21 Gundry, P.78-84.

22 Gundry, P.11-24.

23 Walvoord, P.30-49.

seventy weeks is shared by pre-tribulational and pre-wrath proponents, and also by many post-tribulationists though not all.

It is not the purpose of this article to examine in depth the various interpretations of Daniel 9:24-27, or the accuracy of the prophecy concerning the first sixty-nine weeks of Daniel 9:24-26. A multitude of ancient and modern scholars have attempted to solve the stimulating challenge of Daniels seventy weeks. For example, the fathers from the second to the fourth century such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Hyppolytus, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome and Augustine, advance many theories supporting a Christological and futurist reading of Daniel, whereby the sixty-ninth week culminates with Christ's public ministry and death.²⁴ This view regarding the first sixty-nine weeks of Daniel as culminating in Christ is also shared by many more recent scholars, such as Sir Robert Anderson, John F Walvoord, Alan Hultberg and Robert Gundry. Despite these scholars agreeing that all Christological interpretations tend to culminate in Christ's first advent at the climax of the sixth-ninth week, their methods vary widely, particularly concerning the interpretation of the seventieth week. Therefore, it will suffice here to summarize the general scholarly consensus, regarding the first sixty-nine weeks of Daniel.

Firstly, the interpretative approach of many conservative scholars regarding Daniel 9:24-27 is Christological. Secondly, these scholars generally concede that the number of days in the sixty-nine weeks amounts to 173,880 days, based upon a prophetic 30 day month and 360 day year. This is confirmed by Revelation 11:2-3. In Revelation 11:2-3 the author uses *one thousand*

two hundred and sixty days interchangeably with both *forty two months* and *time, times and half a time*. This kind of prophetic calendar is also implicit when comparing Genesis 7:11, with Genesis 8:3-4. Genesis 7:11 states the flood as beginning on the seventeenth day of the second month, and Genesis 8:3-4 states the flood as having receded by the seventeenth day of the seventh month. The intervening period totals 150 days, prior to Noah's ark resting on the mountains of Ararat, therefore five 30 day months can be implied through this description of 150 days. The Bible's use of a standard prophetic type calendar is therefore implicit throughout the OT, and explicit in Revelation 11:2-3. Calendrical adjustments to compensate for the different calendars used across cultures and epochs would be unnecessary with this kind of prophetic calendar, in order to calculate the number of days present within Daniel's seventy weeks.²⁵

Conservative expositors also now generally accept that the starting point of the prophecy i.e. the decree to rebuild the Temple, is the decree which Artaxerxes I (Longimanus) issued to Nehemiah in 444BC in the month of Nisan. Nehemiah however does not specify which day of the month in Nisan.²⁶ Assuming

25 Hughes, Christopher A. (2013) *Journal of Dispensational Theology* Volume: JODT 17:51. 'The "Terminus Ad Quem" Of Daniel's 69 Week: A Novel Solution,' pp. 124-125.

26 Sir Robert Anderson (1841-1918) a theologian and prolific writer and also a practicing barrister, is well known for proposing this above process of determining the start and terminus dates and number of days within the sixty-nine weeks. His interpretation advocates that the seventy weeks of Daniel represent 490 years divided into three parts: forty-nine years; four hundred and thirty-four years (following the first forty-nine years), and the last week of seven years. The first forty-nine years or seven weeks commences with the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, which he believed was given to Nehemiah in 445 B.C., specifically the first of Nisan or March 14 in that year. According to Anderson the 434 years or sixty-two weeks immediately follow the first forty-nine years, and assuming a prophetic year of 360 days would total 173,880 days, culminating on April 6, A.D. 32 which he believes is the most likely date that Christ entered Jerusalem on a donkey in fulfilment

24 Knowles, Louis E. (1945) *Westminster Theological Journal*. Volume: WTJ 07:2. 'The Interpretation Of The Seventy Weeks Of Daniel In The Early Fathers,' pp. 136-160.

this basic premise or framework, many writers' proposals to solve the puzzle of the first sixty-nine weeks have varied slightly in their detail. For example the start date within the month of Nisan and varying suggestions for a terminus date, including among others the triumphal entry, the crucifixion and the ascension.²⁷ Beginning then with the twentieth year of Artaxerxes reign necessitates calibrating this date to the Julian calendar, for consistency, as the terminus date of the prophecy occurs at a time historically when the Julian calendar was employed.²⁸ The terminus date of the sixty-nine weeks is the time of Jesus ministry death resurrection and ascension. The Julian calendar is a tropical solar calendar measuring 365 days annually and occasionally adding a day to form a leap year, though for the purpose of calculating the number of days in the Danielic prophecy i.e. 173,880 days, this makes no difference.²⁹ Assuming this interpretative approach Christopher A. Hughes offers a more recent and credible interpretation of Daniel

9:24-26, by placing the terminus date of the prophecy at the day of Jesus ascension. Through use of astronomical calculations the evidence for the date of the crucifixion of Christ points to Friday, 3 April of AD 33, as the most likely date.³⁰ If using the resurrection of Christ as the first day of his forty days post-resurrection his ascension can be placed on Thursday, 14 May AD 33, (Julian Day #1733245). Thus working backwards by subtracting 173,880 days from this date would yield Thursday, 23 April of 444 BC (Julian Day #1559365), which equates to 22 Nisan. 22 Nisan would therefore be the day that Artaxerxes gave the decree to Nehemiah to return and rebuild Jerusalem (Neh.2:1, 5), and this interpretation would also satisfy the criteria specified in Nehemiah 2, i.e. that the decree was given during the month of Nisan in Artaxerxes' 20th year.³¹

While the purpose of this paper is not an apologetic for the inerrancy and accuracy of Scripture, nonetheless such a division of the 69 weeks is interesting. However, those who eschew the concept of foretelling the future, will reject such views as mere attempts to support fundamentalism.³²

of Zechariah 9:9. While his general method for obtaining the answer is still appropriate today there is now credible evidence that he was incorrect in some of the details, however some scholars e.g. John F. Walvoord state that "no one today is able dogmatically to declare that Sir Robert Anderson's computations are impossible."

27 Many other scholars e.g. Clarence Larkin, John MacArthur, G. W. West, Dr. Harold Hoehner, and Dr. Thomas Ice while broadly keeping Anderson's proposed process for determining the start and finish times of Daniel 9:24-26, have tried to repair or salvage Anderson's solution by giving defensible dates for the events he places at the beginning and termination of the sixty-nine weeks. Sir Robert Anderson's contemporaries and close friends included well known biblical teachers such as John Nelson Darby, Cyrus Scofield, James Martin Gray, A. C. Dixon, Horatius Bonar and E. W. Bullinger. His book *Human Destiny* has been exclaimed by C. H. Spurgeon to be the most valuable contribution on the subject, which he had seen. Anderson also occupied the role of second Assistant Crime Commissioner for the Metropolitan Police in London from 1888 to 1901.

28 Additionally, the present astronomical standards by which calculations are made is through use of the Julian dates, with their corresponding day numbers.

29 Hughes, pp. 124-125, 127-128.

30 Humphreys, Colin J. (1992) *Tyndale Bulletin*. Volume: TYNBUL 43:2. The Jewish Calendar, A Lunar Eclipse And The Date Of Christ's Crucifixion. pp. 331-350.

31 Hughes, P.133-141.

32 Today the label fundamentalist is applied to a wide range of religious adherents from some conservative Protestants to conservative Muslims, Jews, and Catholics. Protestants themselves even debate over who is a fundamentalist and who is not, e.g. those with strict moral codes and commitments to ecclesiastical separation maybe considered to be fundamentalists. Certain methodological problems are inherent with this kind of labelling, and for this reason Protestants disdain the term fundamentalist because of its negative connotations. Instead Protestants prefer other terms such as conservative, neo-evangelical, evangelical, or simply Christian. In this sense, the term fundamentalism has been abused, in some parts of the world more than others, e.g. the UK. Fea, John. (1994) *Trinity Journal*. Volume: TRINJ 15:2. 'Understanding the Changing Facade of Twentieth-Century American Protestant fundamentalism: Toward a Historical Definition,' pp. 181, 183.

Some credible explanations have now been explored placing the terminus of the sixty-ninth week of Daniels seventy weeks at Christ's first coming, namely his ascension. This article will now proceed to explain how pre-tribulationists, pre-wrath proponents, and post-tribulationists interpret the rapture passages in Scripture, against the backdrop of the seventieth week of Daniel which is assumed to take place in the eschatological future.

THE RISE OF PRE-TRIBULATIONISM

Premillennialist post-tribulationism was the only assumed eschatological perspective for the first three centuries of the early church. The ante-Nicene fathers consistently maintained that the church would witness the abomination of desolation in the middle of the seventieth week of Daniel, and experience persecution under him.³³ As time went by pre-millennial post-tribulationist eschatology began to fall out of favour with most theologians, and from the Middle Ages to the commencement of the 19th century many theologians believed in amillennialism or historicism.³⁴ There are however some pre-tribulationists such as Charles Ryrie, who suggest that there has been an embryonic version of the doctrine of pre-tribulationism from as early as the first century church.³⁵ The beginning of the

33 Gundry, pp. 14-15.

34 Historicism is the teaching that apocalyptic genres of Scripture are generally prophecies about the history of the church, which also deny a future Antichrist and tribulation.

35 Of course whether this is true or not is a different question, as it is acknowledged by pre-tribulationists that a detailed theology of pre-tribulationism is not found in the early church Fathers. Nevertheless, Ryrie asserts that the absence of historical evidence corroborating pre-tribulationism, doesn't therefore confirm that pre-tribulationist exegesis is faulty. Ryrie, Charles C. (1974) *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Volume: BSAC 131:522. "The Church and the Tribulation": A Review. p. 174.

nineteenth century brought with it a resurgence of premillennial thinking, and futurist readings of Daniel and Revelation. Brethren leader John Darby was instrumental in the rise of pre-tribulationist thinking in the 1830s, and this secret rapture theology became the dominant theological position by the 1920s.³⁶ A number of theories about the true origin of Darby's pre-tribulationism have been proposed over the years,³⁷ nevertheless, most current advocates of pre-tribulationism believe that Darby was the originator of his pre-tribulationist views as a result of personal Bible study, most likely during the time he was recovering from a horse riding accident.³⁸ By 1980 post-tribulationism had made a considerable comeback, and pre-tribulationism was by no means any longer the dominant position. This was in part due to the 1956 publication of *The Blessed Hope* by George Eldon Ladd, and Robert H. Gundry's *The Church and the Tribulation* in 1973. Both of these publications articulated a defence of post-tribulationism, with Gundry's publication being particularly exegetical in nature.³⁹ Mid-tribulationism from which the pre-wrath view also developed is relatively new, and its chief

36 Gundry, pp. 16-17.

37 Four main theories attempt to explain the origin of Darby's pre-tribulationism. Firstly it is proposed that Darby got his ideas from Edward Irving (1792-1834) and the Irvingite movement, who purportedly first developed pre-tribulationism, or secondly from a prophetic utterance from a woman in Irving's church in London. Thirdly, it is claimed that Darby's pre-tribulationism was taken from the pseudonymous writings of a Jesuit Priest named Manuel de Lacunza (1731-1801), who wrote under the pseudonym of Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra a converted Jew. The fourth theory is that Darby's pre-tribulationism was the product of a prophecy, from a fifteen-year old Scottish girl named Margaret Macdonald in April 1830.

38 Ice, Thomas. 2014. THE EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL BARNDOLLAR LECTURE SERIES. "The History of the Doctrine of the Rapture" Part IV: "A Refutation of False Origin of the Rapture Theories". P.1-3. On-line available from, http://www.bbc.edu/barndollar/barndollar_refutation_rapture.pdf, Accessed on 29/12/14.

39 Gundry, pp. 16-17.

proponent was Norman B. Harrison who developed it after The Second World War.

THEOLOGICAL TENSIONS

One of the biggest theological tensions between pre-tribulationism and post-tribulationism is that pre-tribulationism interprets the church as being exempt from God's divine wrath, whereas post-tribulationists question the extent of the church's exemption from God's wrath. Post-tribulationists concur with pre-tribulationists, that certain Scriptural passages e.g. Revelation 3:10 certainly indicate at the very least a certain kind of protection to Christians from the period of divine wrath, throughout the tribulation.⁴⁰ Pre-tribulationists interpret this protection as complete removal from the tribulation period, for those Christians. However, post-tribulationists see no such promise in Scripture that Christians will be protected from divine wrath, due to their being raptured prior to its commencement.⁴¹ However, being a post-tribulationist does not have to mean only this stark choice. For example if the tribulation is aimed exclusively and therefore geographically at Israel, (i.e. the time of Jacob's sorrow) then even if the Church is physically present on earth throughout the tribulation, being multi-national it is not necessarily the direct recipient of the tribulation woes. Various scholars hold this theological position, by implication of their eschatological perspective on the Bibles many Antichristic and apocalyptic passages. These scholars believe that the Antichrists reign will be local not universal,

40 This protection need not be exclusively physical and many scholars believe the protection promised in Revelation 3:10 is to be interpreted as spiritual protection, i.e. to enable those Christians in the church of Philadelphia in Revelation 3:10 to persevere under trial without losing their faith.

41 Gundry, pp. 225-226.

and that the final empire described in Daniel 9-11 although being dictatorial and therefore demanding complete allegiance will not be all encompassing.⁴² In other words, they believe the final apocalyptic world scene as depicted in the Bible will be primarily played out in the Middle East, the place of its origin narration and final climax.⁴³

Other key and significant eschatological questions include: the timing of divine wrath in relation to Daniel's seventieth week; the exegetical basis for separating the rapture of the church from the Second Coming, by a period of divine wrath; and the nature and relation of the Olivet discourse to the Parousia passages in the NT epistles. The hermeneutical approach employed by pre-wrath proponents and pre-tribulationists to support their respective theological positions, in regard to the timing of the divine wrath, is clearly crucial to support their particular belief systems concerning the timing of this event. Therefore, the hermeneutical approach they employ in their interpretation of the scriptural passages detailing the rapture and Parousia, particularly revolves around the timing of God's wrath outpoured. The validity and reasonableness of any such hermeneutical and or exegetical approach is therefore essential, to corroborate their respective theological positions.

For example, pre-tribulationists equate the Day of the Lord to the entire tribulation period, which they also equate to the entire seventieth week of Daniel. So the three terms Day of the Lord, great tribulation and Daniels seventieth week become synonymous under the pre-tribulation schema. This therefore

42 Tanner, J. Paul. (1992) *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*: Volume: JETS 35:3. Daniel's "King Of The North": Do We Owe Russia An Apology? pp. 315-328.

43 Tanner, p. 328; Richardson, Joel. 2012. *Mideast Beast*. Ch.3. P.35-36. Washington, D.C. WND Books.

necessitates that pre-tribulationists adequately show from Scripture that the rapture occurs before the commencement of the Day of the Lord, as it is essential for them to demonstrate that Christians will not enter into the Day of the Lord.

For pre-wrath proponents conversely the Day of the Lord is not synonymous with Daniel's seventieth week, as they identify the great tribulation and the specific Day of the Lord as separate events occurring during Daniel's seventieth week. Therefore, pre-wrath proponents concur with post-tribulationists that the church will enter into Daniel's seventieth week, experiencing the tribulation associated with that time period. However pre-wrath advocates diverge from post-tribulationists in that they believe the church to be promised exemption from the Day of the Lord. In this sense pre-wrath advocates agree with pre-tribulationists that Christians will not enter into the Day of the Lord, yet each group has a different definition of the Day of the Lord i.e. the duration and timing of that Day. Pre-wrath advocates must therefore demonstrate from Scripture that the rapture will take place during the second half of Daniel's seventieth week, prior to the Day of the Lord which they believe occurs just before the Second Coming.

Pre-tribulationists draw their conclusions in regard to the rapture partly upon a dispensational approach to Scripture, indeed pre-tribulationism is a major tenet of Dispensationalism. Classic dispensationalists draw a sharp distinction between the Church and the nation of Israel, and this is reflected in their exegesis of many eschatological passages in Scripture. Understandably then post-tribulationists seek to blunt such a sharp distinction between the Church and Israel, while not necessarily denying a future place

and purpose for Israel within God's plan. They do however highlight the exegetical fallacies of falsely dichotomizing between the Church and Israel, as such sharp distinctions may mistakenly support the case for pre-tribulationism. Sharp distinctions between the church and Israel mistakenly support the case for pre-tribulationism, because this hermeneutic assumes that the church is not the recipient of eschatological passages such as Matthew 24, and is therefore not in view, or entirely absent at the time of the great tribulation.

Pre-wrath advocates and post-tribulationists need not rely on or be governed by this kind of dispensational approach, to support or validate their respective theological positions. Because each group whether pre-tribulationist pre-wrath or post-tribulationist identifies the church as being absent or present in various different ways during Daniel's seventieth week, each group therefore interprets passages, such as the Olivet discourse, in dissimilar ways. However some overlap exists between pre-wrath and post-tribulationism in their interpretation of the Olivet discourse, e.g. both groups see Matthew 24:31 as descriptive of the rapture.

These theological tensions will now be explored firstly with the explicit and implicit rapture texts, followed by the less conclusive passages which nevertheless contribute to and enrich the discussion.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:17 & 5:1-11

1 Thessalonians 4:17 is the only passage in the NT which explicitly uses the term [SPI] ἄρπάζω transliterated *harpazō* (Koine Greek) or *rapiro* (Latin), translating into the English caught up, other passages although describing the rapture are less explicit and do not use this term. In 1 Thessalonians 4:17 believers were

concerned that their dead would not be taken to be with Jesus at the Parousia, Paul assures them that those asleep in the Lord would be resurrected first and only after would those who are alive and remain be raptured and meet the Lord together with them in the air. Both pre-tribulationists and pre-wrath advocates locate the rapture before the *Day of the Lord* (1 Thess 5:2) because they believe that the church is promised protection from God's wrath, and this protection is in the form of removal. Therefore both groups understand the rapture primarily as an act of rescue from imminent danger, in contrast to a meeting with the Lord i.e. a delegation meeting. On the contrary, post-tribulationists understand the rapture not as a rescue mission, but as a delegation meeting which takes place at the time of the Second Coming.

Pre-tribulationists agree that the passage makes no mention of the timing of this event, they assert that the timing element is to be determined precisely from reading 1 Thessalonians 4:17 together with 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. Pre-tribulationists also identify textual differences between Matthew 24:31 and 1 Thessalonians 4-5, precluding a parallel account and infer the passages to be describing two separate events.

Pre-wrath advocates on the other hand recognise a parallelism between the Olivet discourse and first and second Thessalonians, and generally place the rapture at v31 of Matthew 24, but agree with pre-tribulationists that the passage is not explicit regarding timing. Therefore, pre-wrath advocates identify the timing aspect mainly through drawing a distinction between the tribulation period which they believe the church will pass through, and the divine wrath of God which occurs in the *Day of the Lord* which they believe the

church is exempt from. Pre-wrath proponents believe therefore that the *Day of the Lord* occurs sometime in the second half of Daniel's seventieth week i.e. the second half of the seven year period, after the abomination of desolation but before the end of this period and certainly before the Parousia. As pre-tribulationists equate the whole of Daniel's seventieth week as being synonymous with the *Day of the Lord*, they therefore interpret only the second part of the Olivet discourse (Matt 24:36-25:46) as being parallel to that of 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 which they understand as describing the entire *Day of the Lord* spread over this seven year period.⁴⁴ And because pre-tribulationists believe that 1 Thessalonians 5:9 promises the church exemption from the *Day of the Lord* which they interpret as the entire seventieth week of Daniel, the rapture must therefore be pre-tribulationist.⁴⁵

The strength of pre-tribulationism regarding their interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4:17, 5:2, 9, necessitates establishing the entire seventieth week of Daniel to be synonymous with the *Day of the Lord*. Failing to do this renders pre-tribulationist exegesis of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 & 5:9 unsatisfactory to uphold pre-tribulationism. As would be expected the pre-wrath view shares many of the same lines of argumentation as that of post-tribulationism, as to why the church will enter the tribulation period otherwise known as the seventieth week of Daniel. These are persuasive lines of argumentation that both pre-wrath and post-tribulationist proponents share, which undermine the notion that the entire seventieth week of Daniel is synonymous with the *Day of the Lord*. Firstly, in 2 Thessalonians 1-12 Paul is relying on established apocalyptic traditions, (e.g. Dan 9-11; Matt 24-25) this

44 Gundry, pp. 32-33, 52-53.

45 Gundry, p. 58.

dependence upon the Matthean and Danielic accounts is clearly seen in the parallelism between the accounts. As stated earlier pre-tribulationists do not consider Matthew 24:30-31 as descriptive of the rapture, but rather of the Second Coming. Pre-tribulationists interpret only the latter part of the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24:36-25:46) as paralleling that of 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, despite the noteworthy parallel between Matthew 24:30-31 and 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 which is the explicit NT rapture verse. Both passages depict the Parousia by reference to clouds at which time the saints are gathered to meet the Lord, both are accompanied by a trumpet blast and also angels. These features also are found in other Thessalonian passages, e.g. 2 Thessalonians 1:7; 2:1, 13; and especially 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10. Throughout these Thessalonian passages can be seen the parallelism to Matthew 24:30-31 which Paul is not only drawing upon but expanding upon due to a “word from the Lord”, (1 Thess 4:15). Paul’s reliance on Matthew 24:30-31 a passage which clearly describes the Parousia, undermines any notion that the two passages are not connected in anyway, or are describing two separate events.

Secondly Paul assures the Thessalonian believers that the *Day of the Lord* will not precede the appearance of the *Abomination of Desolation*, again Paul here is relying on the Matthean account (Matt 24:15). Pre-tribulationists interpret Matthew 24:15 from a dispensational perspective i.e. that this passage only concerns Israel, or that it addresses those tribulation Christians which become Christians during the tribulation. However, as Paul in first and second Thessalonians is relying on the Matthean account which in turn is describing the Danielic Antichrist, it is more likely that the signs related to the appearance of the Antichrist,

i.e. the *Abomination of Desolation*, are intended to reassure the Thessalonian Christians that the *Day of the Lord* had not yet arrived. In other words, the *Abomination of Desolation* as a sign to the Thessalonian Christians precedes the Day of the Lord, but is not part of it as is required for pre-tribulationism. If Paul was a pre-tribulationist why did he not merely defuse the fear of the Thessalonian Christians (2 Thess 2:3) that the *Day of the Lord* had come, by pointing to the fact that all the Christians hadn’t been raptured? On the contrary Paul talks more like a post-tribulationist by stating to them that the Day of the Lord had not arrived, because that day will not precede the great apostasy and the appearance of Antichrist.

Thirdly, Paul’s command to the Thessalonian Christians to watch for the *Day of the Lord* is not a command to watch in order that they may escape it, but rather obedience and faithfulness to Christ as expected of those who belong to the light and to the day. This is seen by the verbs used in Paul’s command in 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8, which do not connote looking for something, but are an exhortation to faithful obedience. This command to watchfulness is the same in principle to that taught in Matthew 25:1-13 where all ten maidens are asleep when the Lord returns, in this passage the exhortation to watch is not gazing up for an any moment return of the Lord, rather it is concerned with having moral vigilance that keeps one ready at all times. The wise maidens which demonstrated this moral vigilance had full lanterns and therefore were considered to have been watchful, as their watchfulness was connected to their faithfulness. Additionally, if the *Day of the Lord* would not overtake the Thessalonian Christians, then Paul would not have used the phrase *like a thief* as a comparative for both unbelievers and believers (1 Thess 5:4). The point Paul is trying

to make here is that the day will come upon both unbelievers and believers simultaneously, though to unbelievers it will be unexpected like a thief in the night, for they will not be anticipating that day. However, for believers the day will not be unexpected and therefore will not surprise them like a thief in the night, as for them it is a day much hoped and anticipated for by the believers. The difference is not whether the Thessalonian Christians experience the *Day of the Lord*, but how they experience it.

Fourthly, believers in every age have undergone tribulation and going through times of tribulation even when the tribulation is appointed by God is not contrary to biblical teaching, e.g. 1 Peter 4:17; 2 Thess 1:3-10; and Heb 12:3-11. This is not to say that the Lord cannot or will not supernaturally protect believers through times of tribulation, as suggested in Revelation 9:4. In fact in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-7 rest for believers from such tribulation is said to happen at the same time that retribution for the unbelievers happens, namely the Second Coming. On this day vengeance on unbelievers and rest for those persecuted believers comes simultaneously in the same event, Paul therefore obviously links the *rest* and the *destruction* to the Revelation of the Lord Jesus.

Fifthly, both pre-tribulationists and pre-wrath advocates interpret the *wrath* to come in 1 Thessalonians 5:9 as the temporal wrath which God will pour out on the *Day of the Lord*, however this is unlikely as Paul juxtaposes the wrath in 1 Thessalonians 5:9 with eternal life. Therefore, Paul is actually saying that God has not appointed the Thessalonian Christians to eternal judgement or final condemnation as is true for those who are in darkness (v4) or of the night (v5), but to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ. This juxtaposing of

final condemnation with eternal life is seen throughout 1 Thessalonians 5 by Paul's contrasting of those who are of the night with those of the day, those in darkness who are asleep to those awake and in the day, and those who are sober with those who are drunk. Furthermore, believers here does not only refer to those alive at the time of the rapture but those who are asleep as contextually Paul has both those alive and asleep in mind, and those asleep would not need deliverance from a temporal wrath of God poured out on the earth. Additionally, this passage does not so much depict the rapture as a means of rescue for the believers from the wrath of God, as both pre-tribulationist and pre-wrath advocates believe, but rather depicts an enjoining to the Lord to be with the Lord forever. The word for meeting the Lord in the air in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is ἀπάντησις transliterated as *apantesin*, and is used in Matthew 25:6 and Acts 28:15. In both places it refers to a meeting in which people go out to meet a dignitary, and then accompany him in to the place from which they came out.⁴⁶ Matthew 25:6 illustrates this to be the case in parabolic form, and therefore serves to parallel the same sense of meaning in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 i.e. that we rise to meet the Lord in the air and then welcome him to earth as king.⁴⁷

As a sixth point the meeting the Lord language in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 seems to be the same day as the *Day of the Lord* with which the Thessalonians are confused, by a straightforward reading of the verse.

⁴⁶ Gundry, p. 200.

⁴⁷ Gundry, Robert H. (1996) *Bulletin for Biblical Research*: Volume: BBR 06:1. A Brief Note on "Hellenistic Formal Receptions and Paul's Use of ΑΠΑΝΤΗΣΙΣ in 1 Thessalonians 4:17." pp. 39-41. Ice, Thomas. (2003) *Conservative Theological Journal*: Volume: CTJ 07:21. The Meeting in the Sky. p. 197.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:51-52
& JOHN 14:2

In 1 Corinthians 15:52 Paul states that the *trump* of God that accompanies the rapture will take place at the sound of the last *trump*, which clearly indicates this will be at the end at the time of the Parousia i.e. post-tribulational. Some pre-tribulationist commentators argue that this last trumpet is the last in a particular series, but much more likely this trumpet is the trumpet which ushers in the last day. This trumpet is probably also the same one as that mentioned in Matthew 24:31, as Jesus only references a trumpet once in association with the gathering of the elect into the kingdom, and here we have Paul stating the transformation of the saints for the kingdom will be associated with the last trumpet a parallel that cannot be ignored.⁴⁸ And assuming the parallel to be correct the trumpet sound in Matthew 24:31 is clearly post-tribulational, thus the transformation of the saints in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 takes place when national Israel receive its eschatological salvation (Isa 27:12-13) after the final tribulation (Matt 24:31).⁴⁹ This also fits in with Paul's purpose in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 which is to demonstrate how living saints can enter the kingdom at the last day, as he had just declared that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God in the previous verse, (1 Cor 15:50).⁵⁰

Pre-tribulationist advocates interpret John 14:2-3 to be teaching about a pre-tribulationist rapture of the saints to be with the Lord, for reasons of comforting the disciples as their Lord was about to depart. However, this inference is not necessary as the text does not mention about

timing, neither does a period of distress in the final tribulation nullify the promise of comfort of being with the Lord at the rapture. And John 14:2-3 does not stipulate that the believers would go directly to heaven, but that they would be with the Lord where he is forever.⁵¹ The pre-tribulationist viewpoint would necessitate that the disciples occupy heavenly rooms for a period of seven years, only to vacate them after these seven years to enter the millennium for one-thousand years.⁵²

MATTHEW 24:3, 15, 31, 34, 40-41

The Olivet discourse is not a passage which establishes the doctrine of the rapture though it does contribute to and enrich the discussion. Most scholars on both sides of the fence generally now recognise that the twelve apostles as recipients are also representative of the church, making this a message applicable not only for national Israel but for the church also. There is a general consensus that the two parts of the Olivet discourse are related to the disciple's questions, (Matt 24:2). Nevertheless there is no consensus as to whether the discourse neatly divides into two sections as it relates to the disciples questions, e.g. Matthew 24:4-35 followed by Matthew 24:36-25:46. Those which do identify such a division and transitional change at 24:36 do not agree as to the order in which Jesus answers the disciples questions, or which answers go to which part or parts. It is reasonable that Jesus disciples must have had in their mind the destruction of the temple in AD70, and also that of the Second Coming. It is reasonable to believe that this passage therefore is historical and eschatological. With this in mind the proposal given here is that Matthew

48 Gundry, p. 198.

49 Gundry, p.198.

50 Johnson, Andy. (2003) *Bulletin for Biblical Research*: Volume: BBR 13:2. On Removing a Trump Card: Flesh and Blood and the Reign of God. p. 190.

51 Gundry, pp. 196-197.

52 Gundry, p. 197.

24:4-14 detail normal catastrophes of the church age, and Matthew 24:15-31 beginning with the sign of the *Abomination of Desolation* midway through Daniel's seventieth week is therefore thoroughly eschatological, concluding with the *Day of the Lord* complex at Matthew 24:29-31. Matthew 24:36-25:46 is in regard to watching for and living in light of the coming Parousia of Matthew 24:30-31. Some pre-tribulationists propose that because Matthew 24:4-31 and Matthew 24:36-25:46 contain the same imagery as the *Day of the Lord* passages, that both are the entire *Day of the Lord* complex. In other words, the first part detailing the signs and the second part explaining the "when" aspect. However, although Matthew 24:4-31 contains the same imagery typically characterising the *Day of the Lord*, this still doesn't necessitate the church's exemption from this whole *Day of the Lord* complex event. For this to be true it relates back to the definition of *wrath* in 1 Thessalonians 5:9, along with the nature of such an exemption which doesn't necessarily mean removal but may also be protection (e.g. Joh 17:15; Rev 3:10).

The comparison and noteworthy parallels between Matthew 24:30-31 with 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 have already been detailed above, and both pre-wrath and post-tribulationists identify the connection between the two verses. Matthew 24:34 falls within the sub-division which in my view is thoroughly eschatological, "this generation" must therefore at the very least include the future generation alive at that time and witnessing "these" things. This interpretation is advanced by a number of evangelical scholars.⁵³ It is also generally recognized now that Matthew 24:40-41 does not refer to the rapture as some have taught, but to those taken in judgement

thus the reference to Noah's flood in Matthew 24:38 with use of the verb *took* them away in v39. Again this is also well recognized by the majority of pre-tribulationists.⁵⁴

REVELATION 1:19, 3:10, 7:14, 11:11-12, 20:4-5

Revelation 1:19 is often used to support a tripartite division in the book of Revelation as John is instructed to write the things he has seen; the things which are; and the things which will be after the things which are. It is argued that because the word church or ἐκκλησία transliterated as *ekklēsia* is not again seen after Revelation 3, that Revelation 4 onward should be interpreted as the final dispensation which follows the age or dispensation of the church which culminates with Revelation 3 i.e. Laodicea. In other words *the things which are to come* are concerned with the events of Daniel's seventieth week, i.e. the next dispensation in God's schema.

However, for several reasons this interpretation of Revelation 1:19 is weak, and at best inconclusive to support pre-tribulationism. Firstly the word church is rarely used in the New Testament to indicate such a universal group, and John himself rarely uses ἐκκλησία other than to denote a local body of believers. Secondly, in Revelation 4:4 the twenty-four elders most naturally suggest the whole people of God, Israel and the church. Thirdly in Revelation 5:10 the elders refer to the church in the third person. For these reasons and others Revelation 1:19 is inconclusive to support a pre-tribulationist position, based on a dispensational

53 Nelson Jr, Neil D. (2007) *Journal of Dispensational Theology*: Volume: JODT 11:33. Three Critical Exegetical Issues In Matthew 24: A Dispensational Interpretation. pp. 61-64.

54 Entrekin, Rusty. 2003. Things to come. Did Jesus Wrongly Predict a First Century Return in Matthew 24:34? Partial Futurists: The Olivet Discourse contains fulfilled and unfulfilled elements. Conclusion. On-line available from, <http://www.thingstocome.org/whatgen.htm>, Accessed on 06/03/15.

interpretation of this verse.

REVELATION 3:10 & 7:14

It is also argued that Revelation 3:10 is a universal promise to remove the church prior to the *hour of trial* that is to come upon the whole earth, i.e. a pre-tribulation perspective. However, although there is a consensus that this verse does indeed promise protection to the believers at Philadelphia, this protection need not be in the form of removal. The phraseology of Revelation 3:10 closely parallels that of John 17:15, where Jesus prayer is not for the removal of the disciples from the world, but for their protection from the evil one.⁵⁵ In Revelation 7:14 we see a great multitude of people coming out of tribulation, pre-tribulationist and pre-wrath advocates interpret this great multitude as those who were raptured prior to the tribulation. However, considering the nature of the protection Christ promises his disciples throughout tribulation in John 17:15, Revelation 7:14 is most likely referring to those saints that have gone through great tribulation. Additionally, as these saints have come out of the great tribulation, this denotes that they have gone through it.

REVELATION 11:11-12

55 Older pre-tribulation advocates also included Rev 4:1-2 as support for their view. The images in Revelation 4:1-2 e.g. a trumpet sound, the voice of God, heaven, and the Spirit, are similar to the imagery described in other rapture passages, however interpreting Revelation 4:1-2 in this way is highly problematic. Rather the language used in Revelation 4:1-2 functions only to describe John's experience as he received his prophetic vision, rather than foretelling a future event. Dispensational writers such as Robert Thomas admit this difficulty, and understand this verse mainly as an invitation to John to see from a new vantage point, for the purpose of the revelation he was going to receive. Svigel, Michael J. (2001) *Trinity Journal*: Volume: TRINJ 22:1. The Apocalypse Of John And The Rapture Of The Church: A Re-evaluation. pp. 29-30.

In Revelation 11:11-12 the two witnesses are overcome by the beast and killed. Their bodies lie in the street giving rise to celebration by all the people around, who forbid their bodies to be buried. After three and a half days their bodies come to life, and they are taken into heaven to the astonishment of the onlookers. This is not viewed as a rapture passage by pre-tribulationists, and though it is viewed as a rapture passage by pre-wrath advocates, it is the timing aspect of this event which once again is thrown into question. The timing of the rapture as detailed in Revelation 11:11-12, revolves around the interpretative approach of the structure of the book of Revelation. For post-tribulationists the book is not chronologically ordered, though for pre-wrath advocates it is chronological. For example, pre-wrath advocates believe that the earthquake of Revelation 6:12 and 16:18 are two separate earthquakes, whereas post-tribulationists believe these two earthquakes to be the same. If the earthquakes of Revelation 6:12 and 16:18 are not the same, then pre-wrath advocates have a strong argument to support a pre-wrath rapture. This interpretation would also undermine identifying the earthquake of Revelation 11:13 as that of Revelation 6:12, and 16:18. However, as post-tribulationists point out there is too much repetition as the visions unfold between Revelation 6-16, to think that the language is chronological. The language in the book of Revelation in many instances seems to be describing Parousia events typical of the *Day of the Lord*, and this is also an indication of the non-chronological structure of the book of Revelation. If the earthquake of Revelation 6:12 is the same as that described in Revelation 16:18 and also the same as that of Revelation 11:13, then the resurrection of the witnesses can be seen to be post-tribulationist. Additionally the witnesses are said to ascend in a cloud and in

v15 a trumpet is mentioned, and clouds and trumpets are both consistently mentioned in rapture passages (e.g. Matt 24:30; Acts 1:9; 1 Thess 4:17; Rev 14:14). Further support for a post-tribulational rapture of the witnesses is seen in that they prophesy for forty-two months (Rev 11:2), and then lie in death for three and a half days (Rev 11:9). If the former references the first half of Daniel's seventieth week, then the latter could indicate the second half of the seventieth week of Daniel. The book of Revelation consistently makes reference to a three and a half year period in various ways, for example 3 ½ days in Revelation 12:14, 1260 days in Revelation 11:3, and 12:6, and 42 Months in Revelation 11:2, and 13:5. These lines of argumentation are by no means conclusive, and as previously stated only serve to enrich the discussion over the timing of the rapture.

REVELATION 20:4-5

Revelation 20:4-5 is clearly a resurrection passage and is described as the first resurrection, and as such must include the entire body of the redeemed. To restrict this resurrection to anything less than this faces two problems. Firstly those resurrected are identified as those who reign with Christ for a thousand years. Limiting those resurrected in Revelation 20:4-5 to the tribulation martyrs as pre-tribulational and pre-wrath advocates do, also limits those who reign with Christ in the millennium exclusively to the tribulational martyrs. Secondly, the contrasting of this first resurrection against the second resurrection, which includes only the unrighteous, implies that the first resurrection includes all of the righteous. One of the only objections to this is the sequence of events in Revelation 20 which seem to place the rapture as post Parousia, in other words a non-rapture.

However there is nothing in the text to suggest to the reader that these events transpire in a chronological sequence, and it is far likelier that John is reporting various aspects of Christ's return. Revelation 20:4-5 which seemingly places the rapture as post Parousia should be viewed diachronically, within and against the broader context of each of the rapture passages.

CONCLUSION

The timing of the rapture is not explicitly mentioned throughout the Bible, however it can be inferred from a number of texts. A straightforward reading of the text consistently points toward a post-tribulational rapture. In order to hold to a pre-tribulational or pre-wrath rapture the reader has to seemingly attribute meaning to certain passages which from a straightforward reading cannot easily be seen or understood. While the Bible is not always straightforward or easy to interpret e.g. the progressive unfolding of salvation history as prophesied in the OT, particularly the OT mysteries not realised until the NT era, nevertheless interpreting the rapture passages utilizing a complicated hermeneutical system seems to miss the straightforward meaning of the various passages. This is true with the explicit passages in the NT (e.g. 1 Thess 4:17) where the stress should be placed upon union with Christ rather than escaping temporary wrath, and also true with the implicit passages (e.g. 1 Cor 15:51-52) which clearly describes the rapture to take place at the last trumpet. The straightforward reading of the passage is post-tribulational i.e. the last trumpet, not the last in a series of trumpets (Rev 11:15) which then requires one more last trumpet to be sounded at Christ's Second Coming. Post-tribulationists therefore identify the last trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52

as that of Revelation 11:15, and also recognize a strong correlation between the events of Matthew 24:29-31 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16. This straightforward reading does not therefore require two last trumpets, two great earthquakes, and two separate comings of Christ. A straightforward reading of 2 Thessalonians 1:10 also infers a post-tribulation rapture, and does not necessitate interpreting the Day of the Lord as the entire seventieth week of Daniel. Here God's wrath is juxtaposed against eternal life, the straightforward interpretation of wrath is equal to condemnation generally not temporal wrath at the Second Coming, and yet both pre-tribulationism and the pre-wrath view require the wrath of 2 Thessalonians 1:10 to be primarily temporal not finally condemnatory.

Post-tribulationism is the conclusion reached from a straightforward reading of Matthew 24. This interpretation does not necessitate Jesus to answer his disciples questions back to front, and does not demand a strict dividing of Matthew 24-25 at Matthew 24:36, dichotomising the passage between two separate comings of Christ as pre-tribulationism does. When turning to Revelation we also see that there are many passages which suggest a post-tribulation rapture, (e.g. Rev 11:11-12; 20:4-5), and the main reasons to suggest otherwise are less than compelling. Post-tribulationism does not undermine the biblical notion of imminency when the rapture is not understood exclusively as any moment, and accords more with the Bible's general exhortation toward faithfulness to Christ rather than continually looking for the sign of his coming.

One must remember when debating the issue of pre-tribulationism, pre-wrath or post-tribulationism, that the position adopted is not a

test of orthodoxy. The scriptures are not entirely clear on this issue and there is room to arrive at different conclusions, the essential thing is to discuss this issue in the spirit of Christian love, with thoughtfulness and respect.

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