

**By Robert Van Kampen & Rev. Roger Best**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The prewrath position continues to gain support as serious Bible students examine it in light of Scripture. For that is the crucial test and is why the Bereans “. . . received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). The important factor is not what we may teach or believe but rather, what does Scripture say when we take it for what it says. We need to read the language of Scripture in its normal, natural, customary usage, as we are careful to take it in context, and then compare Scripture with Scripture. Too often Christians are not like the Bereans and are led astray and “. . . tossed here and there by waves. and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming. . .” (Eph. 4:14). We need Bereans who are faithful in saturating themselves with the Word of God and willing to check out everything they hear to see if indeed it is truth.

We are thankful for many who we hear from who are excited about seeing what God really says about end-time events. One of the many encouraging comments to us was made by Dr. Walter Kaiser, the former dean of faculty at Trinity Seminary, who made the observation that the prewrath position is the only prophetic position that properly understands and utilizes Old Testament prophecy concerning the Day of the Lord. He also stated that if the fathers of dispensationalism had had the choice between pretrib and prewrath, he genuinely believed that the prewrath position would have gotten their vote, hands down. Dr. Kaiser understands the prewrath position as he listened to two 5-6 hour presentations of the prewrath position that we gave to the department heads of Trinity Seminary several years ago.

The prewrath position on the timing of the rapture of the Church is often questioned, especially by pretribulationists. Many find it difficult to give up their traditions, what they have been taught, or perhaps what they have taught. The prewrath position is simply an enhancement of the historical position held by the early church fathers. The pretribulation position, on the other hand, is a relatively

new position, first gaining popularity in the late nineteenth century. Those who attack the prewrath position, more times than not, have never read **The Sign** because either they never considered the position or they fear the consequences if they adopted the position, consequences they are were unwilling to endure. For these reasons, they aggressively try to shoot the position down without really understanding it and how it is arrived at via the teaching of Christ and Paul.

Because of several books and articles that have been written against the prewrath position by Christians which dogmatically maintain that they take Scripture for what it says, we have compiled a list of a few of the problems with pretribulationism. These must be answered both logically and biblically if one is to have real biblical integrity concerning the view he is espousing. Perhaps this list of issues will be helpful to those who are asking us, “How do we get our pretrib pastor to honestly consider the problems associated with what he is teaching?” After all, it is the lives of the flock they are told to shepherd and protect that are directly at risk if their position is wrong. If pretribulationism is true, these problems must be answered honestly from Scripture with logical, unforced answers that do not contradict other passages. Biblical truth does not spawn confusion. If, however, pretribulationism cannot be clearly argued and substantiated from Scripture, pastors must have the right to teach their conscience on this matter without the fear of reprisal from their fellowship leaders. Lives of God’s elect are at stake (Mt. 24:21-22), not some remote doctrine that will have no severe consequences if one is wrong. Without going into any great depth, here are a few questions that concern pretribulationism.

## **WHAT IS PRETRIB’S ORIGIN?**

First of all, pretribulationism didn’t exist before 1830 and there is considerable documentary proof that it was initially introduced in England by Edward Irving, the father of the charismatic Apostolic Church and not John Darby. Edward Irving probably picked up the idea of an “any moment rapture” from his work on the translation of Emanuel Lucunza’s book, **The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty**, a Catholic priest who initially wrote the book in Spanish under the pen name of Rabbi Ben Ezra. In reality, with whom the pretribulationism position originated really does not make that much difference other than the fact that it

contradicts the first 1800 years of prophetic thought and contradicts the plain teaching of the New Testament. On the other had, the basic tenant of prewrath (that the Church will undergo the persecution of Antichrist before the return of Christ) was taught clearly and consistently by early Church fathers. Among the evangelicals, what other basic doctrine of Scripture, other than pretribulationism, has been “discovered” in the past 160 years and directly contradicts the basic, accepted teachings (as a whole) of the early church fathers? There is none. Some will tell you that pretribulationism is a result of “progressive revelation,” but look out. There is a lot of baggage when you take that position. Where do you stop and who decides where? The revelation of God ceased with the completion of Scriptures.

### **DOES PRETRIB HAVE SOLID SCRIPTURAL BASIS?**

Second, pretribulationism has no clear biblical basis of support, only problem passages such as 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8 (which is ignored) and Matthew 24:15-31 (which is ascribed to unsaved Israel). By comparison, the prewrath position can be clearly argued from the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and the Book of Revelation, with absolute consistency and no contradictions, letting the student of God’s Word compare Scripture with Scripture without fear of contradiction, finding instead perfect harmony in all that is recorded in the New Testament.

### **ARE MATTHEW AND REVELATION FOR THE CHURCH OR UNSAVED ISRAEL?**

Third, pretribulationism views substantial sections of New Testament Scripture as having no application to the Church (in fact, many pretribulationists find it necessary to eliminate the entire Book of Matthew). For this reason, the applicability of the Beatitudes to the Church is denied, as well as the Great Commission in order to protect pretribulationism from the plain and obvious teachings concerning the timing of Christ’s return as given in the Olivet Discourse! However, the flawed position that the Olivet Discourse describes the coming of Christ at Armageddon (instead of the coming of Christ for His elect at the rapture), is both logically and expositionally an absolute impossibility if one takes the time to consider the context of His coming (parousia) as it relates to other clear passages. For example, Christ teaches in the Olivet Discourse that “in those days

which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be” (Mt. 24:38-39). In other words, Christ taught His disciples that life will be going on “as usual” right up until the time of His coming. How can the world be going on like nothing has happened, when if pretribulationism is correct and the Olivet Discourse is referring to the battle of Armageddon, the earth has just undergone the worse series of events known to mankind, leading up to the final battle at Armageddon, including the death of a third of mankind (the sixth trumpet), the turning to blood of all the seas and all the rivers and every spring of water (the second and third bowl judgments), and all the armies of the world preparing for battle against God in the plains of Armageddon (the sixth bowl) and, immediately prior to Armageddon, the destruction of every island and mountain by the worst earthquake known to man, followed by 100-pound hail stones rained down upon those in flight (the seventh bowl judgment).

In addition, if the Olivet discourse is written for unbelieving Jews going into the seventieth week, why the repeated use of the personal pronoun “you” (vv. 4, 6, 9, 15, 20, 23, 25, 26, 33, etc.), when Christ was addressing His disciples, His followers that soon thereafter would build His Church and would suffer and die for the cause of Christ? And how can the elect (vv. 22, 24) be unsaved Israel, if the unsaved remnant of Israel does not come to know Christ until after the seventieth week is complete (Dan. 9:24; Rom. 11:25-26, cf. Rev. 10:7), and how is it that every other use of the term “elect” in the New Testament is a direct reference only to the Church, and suddenly the elect in the Great Tribulation (Mt. 24:21-22) refers to unsaved Israel. And if not unsaved Israel, how can this be a reference to Gentile converts during a time devoted exclusively to Israel (remember, pretribulationism teaches that the entire seventieth week is a different dispensation, devoted to the nation Israel), especially in light fact that Paul tells us that during the reign of Antichrist there will be little if any salvation. “. . . Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth . . .” (2 Th. 2:9-12). During the Great Tribulation, those unbelievers who are not

deceived by Satan will be deluded by God. The elect in the context of the Olivet Discourse cannot be a reference to a huge Jewish or Gentile revival, if Paul's words are taken at face value. Therefore, the Olivet Discourse cannot be a reference to the battle of Armageddon. It must be a reference to exactly what Christ says it is, to His coming when "He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (Mt. 24:31). In other words, the rapture of the Church.

However, the prewrath position sees all of the Book of Matthew as applicable to the Church and thereby consistent with the command of Christ to teach new believers "all that I command you" (Mt. 28:20). As such, it permits us to accept the parallel teachings concerning the parousia of Christ recorded in the Gospels of Mark and Luke without the confusion of which Gospel is for the Jews and which is for the Church. It also negates the question of why, if the teaching in Matthew is only for the Jews (and it is not), it is included in the other Gospels if they are intended solely for the Church.

Pretribulationism sees much, if not all, of the Book of Matthew and most of the Book of Revelation as not written for the Church, but rather for "unsaved" Israel that will come to know Christ during the 70th Week. How can the Church not be in mind in these key passages in light of the given audiences to whom these books are written (Rev. 1:1 – His bondservants, and 22:16 – the churches, and Mt. 28:20 – the new disciples from all nations)? In reality, pretribulationism accomplishes for the conservative Christian what he dare not do with culture. Liberalism throws out Scripture because it says it is cultural. Pretribulationism throws Scripture into what Greek scholar, Samuel Tregelles, called "The Jewish wastebasket" because it says it is not applicable to the Church.

## **ARE THERE TWO PAROUSIAS OF CHRIST?**

Fourth, pretribulationism sees two separate parousias (comings) of Christ, one when He comes "for His Church" and the second, when He comes "with His Church," a grammatical position with not one verse of substantiation or explanation. One second coming of Christ (parousia) is referred to, never two, never spoken of in the plural, and never differentiated by any writer, including Christ. As important as the return of Christ is, if two separate parousias were the teachings of Christ and Paul, there would be no confusion in this matter. What's

even worse, the proof text of Christ coming “with” the Church is a singular passage given in Revelation 19. At the great and final battle of Armageddon, “the armies which are heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him [Christ] on white horses” (v.14). Simply because they are wearing white linen clothing some assume Christ’s army must be the “bride of Christ,” even though the angels are seen wearing the exact same clothing (Rev. 15:6). Both Christ and Paul taught that it would be His angels that accompany Christ in battle during the day of the Lord (Mt. 16:27; 2 Th. 1:7-8). The idea that the new bride of Christ is to, immediately after the marriage ceremony described earlier in the chapter, follow her bridegroom into battle stretches one’s imagination, especially in the light of the other clear teachings of Scripture. The prewrath view sees only one parousia of Christ, at a time that perfectly harmonizes every passage.

### **WHAT IS THE TEACHING OF REVELATION 3:10?**

Fifth, some try to use Revelation 3:10 as the key verse to prove that the Church will not be present during “the hour of testing.” However some of the greatest recognized Greek scholars of the past several centuries (i.e. Moffatt, Goodspeed, Fausset, Beckwith, Zahn, Trench, Swete, Alford, Tregelles, and Robertson to name just a few) take the position that this verse promises removal out from within the sphere of danger, not kept outside it. If protection outside the sphere of danger had been what was intended, clearly other Greek words (i.e. apo) would have been used instead of ek.

In addition, if pretribulationism is going to use Rev. 3:10 (the church of Philadelphia) as a proof text, then it must also be consistent and use the church of Thyatira with the same end-time application. In that church Christ directly tells John that “My bondservants” (Rev. 2:20) who have been led astray by Jezebel, “I will cast . . . into great tribulation unless they repent of her [Jezebel’s] deeds” (Rev. 2:22). The next verse goes on to say that “all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts.” Therefore, the bondservants are part of the Church, not a group of believers that come to Christ after the Church has been raptured. As it is, only Christ uses this term “great tribulation” and only three times in Scripture. In the other two cases (Mt. 24:21; Rev. 7:14) there is no question that it refers to the second half of the seventieth week. To accommodate its position, pretribulationism must deny the obvious. On the other hand, If Christ meant what

He said, and “great tribulation” refers to exactly how He used the phrase in His other teaching concerning the last days, the pretribulation view of Revelation 3:10 is directly contradictory to Revelation 2:22.

Testing always implies separation of ranking. There is no need to test the whole world after the separation has already taken place. However, pretribulationism maintains that the testing occurs after the rapture of the Church. The prewrath view, by comparison, shows that the Church is removed during the testing as the Scripture says, “the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation [the same word translated “testing” in Rev. 3:10] and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Peter 2:9).

### **WHAT ABOUT IMMINENCY?**

Sixth, the doctrine of imminency is nowhere taught in Scripture. The concept that Christ could return at “any moment” since His departure back to heaven is simply not taught anywhere in the entire Bible. Not one of the passages used to sustain imminency, actually teach imminency. Expectancy, yes. Imminency (an any-moment rapture), no. If imminency had been the concept that the writers had wanted to convey, it could have and would have been clearly stated (in fact 19th century promoters of pretribulationism initially taught expectancy rather than imminency for this reason). In addition, there were many events prophesied by Christ, known throughout the Christian world at that time, that still had to occur before He could return, such as the destruction of the Temple (Lk. 21:6) and the death of Peter (Jn. 21:18-19). Imminency was an impossibility until the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D.

Likewise, Christ taught that His rescue of the elect of God will occur “on the same day” that His wrath will begin upon the wicked that remain (Lk 17:26-30). There is no gap of time between the rapture and His wrath. If the seventieth week of Daniel is really the wrath of God, as pretribulationism maintains, and the seventieth week begins with Israel’s covenant with Antichrist (Dan. 9:27), then Israel must be back in the land and Antichrist must be on the world scene before the Rapture, a simple deduction which once again destroys the unbiblical concept of imminency. But the prewrath position has no problem with any of these passages, including Revelation 12:12, where the persecution of Antichrist against the “elect” of God during the great tribulation is not called the wrath of God, but rather, the wrath of Satan.

Pretribulationism makes Antichrist's persecution of God's elect the wrath of God. Prewrath rapturism sees this great persecution as the wrath of Satan (Rev. 12:12 being the proof text). Antichrist's persecution of God's elect is never the wrath of God (Mt. 24:21-22; Rev. 12:7; 13:7; 14:12-13).

### **IS THE GREAT TRIBULATION CUT SHORT?**

Lastly, why does pretribulationism deny the clear, plain teaching of Christ that states His coming will occur when He cuts short (amputates) the great tribulation for the sake of the lives of the elect (Mt. 24:21-31)? This theme is repeated and expanded upon in Mark and Luke with the same substance and sequence again perfectly confirmed by the teaching of Paul to the Thessalonian church. Why deny the clear warnings given to the Church that enters the last days? The stakes are so very high!

### **IS THE CHURCH AT RISK?**

Those who teach pretribulationism run a big risk by telling believers that this does not concern them. Christ specifically told the disciples to teach His disciples from all nations "to observe all that I commanded you" (Mt. 28:20) and again told John "to show to His bondservants that things which must shortly take place" (Rev. 1:1). Yet, pretribulationism teaches that these two critical passages (Matthew 24 and Revelation) are not written for the Church, but for unsaved Israel that enters into the final seven years of human history as we know it. Why are His "bondservants" told to read, hear, and heed the words of the prophecy of Christ's revelation to John (Rev. 1:3)? Woe to the one who "takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, [because] God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city" (Rev. 22:19). If one compares all the passages of Revelation, they all fit perfectly and give no comfort to the compromising Church of the last days.

We have such an overwhelming concern for the Church today. We are upset about what is being taught because the teaching of Christ is so clear concerning the persecution the Church will undergo before Christ returns, and the cost will be so high to those who are unprepared.



## WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE TEACH?

It is very interesting to read the negative reviews on the prewrath position. Not one review to date has dealt with the biblical position of prewrath. Some have set up straw men, and when they tear these straw men down, they think they have accomplished something. Others rehash the idea that certainly all the great men who held to pretribulationism could not have been wrong. The reason, we believe, is because the prewrath position cannot be attacked by taking Scripture at its face value. It is too firmly based upon Scripture.

Their argument is not with us, it's with the Word of God. We have only taken it for what it says, harmonized it with all the other passages saying the exact same thing and gone on record that the Bible clearly tells us what will occur just prior to the coming of Christ.

To say that we are concerned is an understatement. Whereas we refuse to set dates and hopefully will never be guilty of trying to squeeze Scripture into fitting current events, rather wait for current events to fulfill Scripture; nevertheless, there is a sense of urgency that drives our aggressiveness, as you may sense from the tenor of this study. The condition of the Church today and the world's political scene are such that the beginning of the seventieth week of Daniel could begin, as it were, overnight.

Pretribulationism, if it is wrong, will result in the untold agony of innocent Christians who have believed it. In light of that, end-time prophecy becomes very relevant, "For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved [delivered], what will become of the godless man and the sinner?" (1 Peter 4:17-18)

On the other hand, if the prewrath view is wrong, it has only helped make Christians more alert and watchful for the return of Christ through holy living (2 Th. 1:4-11; Lk. 21:25-36; 1 Jn. 2:28). The problem is that we know that the words of Christ, substantiated by Paul, are for the Church, and the unprepared Church has been set up for "a great tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall, and unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, those days shall be cut

short” (Mt. 24:21). That makes all previous persecutions pale in comparison to the persecution the elect of God will undergo during the great tribulation of Antichrist. The truth must be proclaimed, no matter how unacceptable it is to those who seem more concerned with tradition than the clear teaching of Christ, especially in the day and age we live in today. “It is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe that man through whom the stumbling block comes” (Mt. 18:7).

Paul, after warning the confused Thessalonians to “let no one in any way deceive you” (2 Th. 2:3) concerning the timing of “our gathering together to Him [Christ]” and the timing of when “the day of the Lord has come” (2 Th. 2:1-2), ends his profoundly clear sequence of events that must precede the “appearance of His [Christ] coming” (2 Th. 2:8) with this admonition: “If anyone does not obey [listen, attend to] our instruction [words] in this letter [which is almost entirely prophetic concerning the second coming of Christ], take special note of that man and do not associate with him so that he may be put to shame. And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” (2 Th. 3:14-15). Why? Because the stakes are too high for genuine believers to be misled by teachers in whom they have put their trust. The beginning of the seventieth week could occur almost overnight. We are the first generation of the Church since 70 A.D. to be in this peculiar position in history. As never before, we must be alert and sober.

## **CONCLUSION**

We realize that there are many views concerning prophecy. However, there is a major disagreement by sincere men of God over every position one chooses to take and be dogmatic about. If one employs the proper hermeneutic (consistent literal interpretation), truth can be known by those willing to study to show themselves approved, by rightly dividing the Word of God. But truth is truth no matter who agrees or disagrees, or how sincere their motives. So it is with end-time theology. The truth of what is being taught is Scripture is so simple. What are complex and confusing about the coming of Christ are the systems and traditions of men which have absolutely no biblical basis. Men and their wishful thinking make the issues concerning the last days confusing, which aids the cause of Satan who cannot afford to have the Church prepared for the last days. Satan will do all he can to keep men out of the Book of Genesis, upon which fact all men will be held accountable (Rom. 1:20). He will also do all he can to keep men out of the Book of

Revelation, because end-time events, in particular the “hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth” (Rev. 3:10), will determine what will happen to Satan (Rev. 20:2) and who will rule the world (Rev. 11:15).

Well, you have seen our heart, our passion, and why we are driven the way we are, especially as we see the compromised condition of the Church today and know the cost of being unprepared. Our prayer is that the Church will not be “surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation” (1 Pet. 4:12-13) rather than “shrink away from Him in shame at His coming” (1 Jn. 2:28). We realize the battle that we are in, yet we know that God has given us the grace to overcome whatever hardships go with the territory. Yet we have the quiet peace that what we do, we do for the sheep we are commanded to shepherd, based upon the authority of Scripture that we teach them “to observe all that I [Christ] command you; and lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Praise God.