

Appendix B

The Pre-Wrath Rapture Position Answered

In recent years, another variation of the Mid-Tribulational position has become popular through the writings of one-time Pre-Tribulationist Marvin Rosenthal and his mentor Bob Van Kampen. This view is promoted by its proponents as the Pre-Wrath position.

Because of the somewhat aggressive manner in which this view is being popularized by its proponents, and because it has “converted” what used to be a vocal Pre-Tribulationist, I have reserved an entire Appendix to a discussion of this view. In the commentary that follows, I will list their major arguments and provide a Pre-Tribulationist response to each. In setting forth their position, I will refer to three separate works by their leading voices. It should be noted that this critique uses the *Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* as its major source of information about the Pre-Wrath position. However, even a cursory reading of the works by Van Kampen show that both he and Marvin Rosenthal preach the same message. These works are listed below:

- PWR** *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* by Marvin Rosenthal (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990).
- TS** *The Sign* by Robert Van Kampen (Crossway Books, 1993).
- TRQA** *The Rapture Question Answered* by Robert Van Kampen (Fleming H. Revell, 1997).

Definition

I have boiled down the Pre-Wrath Rapture position down to these six basic points. There are a lot more issues involved, such as the identification of the restrainer in 2 Thessalonians 2, but these are omitted for the sake of space. Also, if one calls into question the major pillars on which this view stands, the rest of the position comes tumbling down.

1. The Rapture occurs not at the midpoint of the Tribulation, but sometime during the second half of the Tribulation (**PWR** 59-61).
2. The Church is raptured prior to the start of the Day of the Lord, which according to this position starts during the last part of the Tribulation (**PWR** 60). A great deal of energy and effort goes into forcing the definition of the Day of the Lord to be the last quarter or so of the Tribulation.
3. The Doctrine of Immanency (the teaching that Christ could come at any time) is a false doctrine and unsupportable by Scripture. According to the Pre-Wrath position, certain and specific events must take place prior to the Second Coming of the Lord for the Church. Thus the rapture cannot take place prior to these events.
4. The Church is protected from Divine Wrath (starting with the sixth seal), but not from the wrath of men (seals one to five). In fact, the Pre-Wrath position takes a lot of time to distinguish man's wrath from God's wrath in the Tribulation (**TRQA** chapter 7).
5. The Pre-Wrath position holds that the Scriptures teach clearly that the Day of the Lord starts with six specific events (the coming of Elijah, signs in the heavens, the sealing of the 144,000, the coming of God's wrath, the apostasy and the man of sin being revealed, and the blowing of the last trump), and since the Church is raptured immediately

preceding the Day of the Lord, these events also mark the rapture of the Church (TRQA chapter 3). There is no leeway for a period of time between the actual rapture and the Day of the Lord.

6. The Pre-Wrath position is very dogmatic in its interpretation of the prophetic future and attacks the Pre-Tribulational view with an uncharacteristic fervor. Those who are not assured of their Pre-Tribulational viewpoint may find themselves swayed by the rhetoric and dogmatism of the Pre-Wrath position (TRQA chapter 9, PWR chapter 18).

A Critique in Outline Form

A. The Definition of the Tribulation

1. The Pre-Wrath Definition

- a. The Pre-Wrath position divides the Tribulational Period into three distinct parts: The Beginning of Sorrows, the Great Tribulation, and the Day of the Lord (PWR 61).
- b. The Pre-Wrath position also avoids the use of the term “Tribulation” as they affirm it is more accurate to use the phrase “70th Week of Daniel.” (PWR 103).
- c. The Pre-Wrath position says that since the term “Tribulation” does not occur in the Bible, it is a technical term invented by the Pre-Tribulational position which is foreign to Scripture (PWR 105).
- d. God’s wrath is only poured out on the earth during the last part of Daniel’s 70th week, the Day of the Lord (PWR 61).

2. The Pre-Tribulational Position

- a. The Tribulation period consists of two major parts, the Beginnings of Sorrows and the Great Tribulation using Christ’s description of this time in Matthew 24 and 25.
- b. The Tribulation is a term used to refer to the entire seven-year period known in the Old Testament as “the time of Jacob’s Trouble” or Daniel’s 70th week. It is a descriptive term used to describe this seven-year period of judgment and trouble which will come upon the earth just prior to the Millennium.
- c. Although the term “Tribulation Period” does not occur in the Bible, neither does Grandfather, Trinity, Second Coming, Rapture, or Premillennial. The existence, or non-existence, of a term does not necessarily mean that it is erroneous to use the term. This is a straw-man argument.
- d. God’s wrath is poured out during the entire seven years of the Tribulation although it reaches its climax during the last half. The first half is described by Christ as the beginning of sorrows and the second half as “great tribulation” (Matthew 24-25). Pre-wrath rapturists have no basis for saying that the first half of the Tribulation consists of man’s wrath against man (most notably believers), and the second half is God’s wrath against men. The only difference between the two halves of the Tribulation is that during

the first half God mediates his wrath through men in the form of wars, famine, and disease. In the second half, God is more direct as he now uses nature in addition to wars.

B. The Nature of the Seven Seals

1. The Pre-Wrath Position

- a. The first five seals are not outpourings of God's wrath, but that of man's wrath on other men (**PWR 106-107**).
- b. The sixth seal is the beginning of the outpouring of God's wrath and signifies the start of the Day of the Lord.
- c. The seventh seal, which encompasses the seven trumpet and bowl judgments, is God's wrath poured out on unreemmed mankind.
- d. The seals are not indicative of God's wrath, but his protection of the believer during the 70th week (**PWR 145**).

2. The Pre-Tribulational Position

- a. All seven seals are outpourings of God's wrath which intensifies as the Tribulation progresses, reaching a climax just prior to the end.
- b. There is no justification for identifying the first five seals as man's wrath against man as each seal is indicative of God's judicial judgment elsewhere in Scripture (Ezekiel 14:21, Leviticus 26:22, 25, Deuteronomy 28:21-25). The division of seals 1-5 with 6-7 is artificial, arbitrary, and unsupported.

C. The Day of the Lord

1. The Pre-Wrath Position (**PWR 115-134**)

- a. The Day of the Lord is a technical term which refers to a period in which God pours out his wrath on unregenerate men and always refers to the last half of the last half of the Tribulation.
- b. The Day of the Lord starts during the last half of Daniel's 70th Week and ends with the Second Coming of Christ.
- c. The church is raptured immediately prior to the start of the Day of the Lord, which would place the rapture about 3/4 of the way through Daniel's 70th Week.

2. The Pre-Tribulational Position

- a. The Day of the Lord is a general phrase used to describe a period in which God deals directly with man.
- b. The eschatological Day of the Lord includes the Tribulation and the Millennium (2 Peter 3). Additionally, there have been past Days of the Lord, one such being the time God poured out his wrath on Babylon (Isaiah 13-14).

- b. The church is raptured prior to the start of the Day of the Lord, which includes all of the seven years of the Tribulational period. It also includes the end of the Millennium as that is when God recreates the universe (2 Peter 3).

D. The Start of the Day of the Lord

1. The Pre-Wrath Position - Six Events must occur prior to the Day of the Lord.
 - a. Cosmic disturbances (**PWR 149-160**)
 - b. The coming of Elijah (**PWR 161-176**)
 - c. The day of God's Wrath (**PWR 177-185**)
 - d. The sealing of the 144,000 (**PWR 186-193**)
 - e. The last trump (**PWR 194-196**)
 - f. The apostasy and the man of sin (**PWR 197-210**)
2. The Pre-Tribulational Position
 - a. The Eschatological Day of the Lord (technical term), to be distinguished from historical Days of the Lord (general term) starts with the rapture of the church and ends with the New Heavens and Earth. This would include the entire seven-year tribulational period and the Millennium.
 - b. In answer to each of the Pre-Wrath's six events which start the Day of the Lord:
 - 1). Cosmic disturbances will be happening throughout the Tribulational period. There is nothing in the Bible to preclude their occurrence after the rapture of the Church and before the commencement of the Tribulation as it is not uncommon for a brief transitional time to exist between two great "dispensations." Additionally, most of these cosmic disturbances are anthropocentric descriptions of natural and man-made disasters. For example, the darkening of the Sun and Moon most likely refer to the fact that there is so much dust and ash in the atmosphere that only 2/3 of the light that normally reaches the surface of the earth actually makes it there.
 - 2). The coming of Elijah is prophesied in Malachi 4:5-6. Although there is great debate as to whether Elijah is one of the two witnesses during the Tribulation, we do know that Elijah came in a figurative sense in the form of John the Baptist (Matthew 11:14). In any case, there is nothing to preclude the understanding that Elijah does come during the Tribulation before the Day of the Lord is fully realized upon the earth.
 - 3). In Revelation 6:16 we read, "the great day of his wrath is come." The Pre-Wrath position says that this is a prophetic reference to the future Day of the Lord, which is about to start. However, the term "is come" is in the Greek aorist indicative tense which does not refer to an impending event, but to a past event. Thus a better rendering of the

verse is “the great day of his wrath has come.” Thus, it would appear that God’s wrath is seen throughout the seven years of the tribulation and not just during the last half of the last half.

- 4). In Revelation 7 we read of the 144,000 who are sealed by God for protection during the Tribulation. The Pre-Wrath position holds that these 144,000 are specially sealed believers who will be protected from man's wrath so as God would have a remnant on the earth during the first part of the Tribulation. They further state that since we see this number in heaven in Revelation 14, this is a proof that these specially-selected evangelists have been raptured sometime between chapter 7 and 14. The Pre-Tribulation position is that these are specially selected Jews who are sealed by God as his witnesses during the Tribulation. An additional problem with the Pre-Wrath position is that the Mount Zion spoken of in Revelation 14 is not the heavenly Mount Zion, but the earthly Mount Zion. These 144,000 Jews have made it unscathed through the Tribulation and now stand on the earth as a witness to God’s preserving power. There is not hint of them being raptured.

The Pre-Wrath position also states that the multitude under the altar in Revelation 7 refers to the just-raptured church. The problem is that the word “come” in Revelation 7:14 is in the Greek present tense, and literally means “continually come.” The multitude under the altar are those who continually come out of the Tribulation as they are martyred for their faith.

- 5). The last trump, according to the Pre-Wrath position, is the final outpouring of God’s wrath during the Day of the Lord (**PWR** 193). The Pre-Tribulationist view is that the last trump refers to the last in a series of trumpets which signal the rapture of the church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).
- 6). The apostasy mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2 is taken by the Pre-Wrath position to refer to the abandonment of God by Israel during the Tribulation (**PWR** 199-201). Pre-Tribulationists interpret the apostasy as referring to a widespread abandonment of Biblical truth during the end-times immediately prior to the rapture and the Second Coming (1 Timothy 4:1-3, 2 Timothy 4:1-3, 2 Timothy 3:1-7).

E. The Restrainer of 2 Thessalonians

1. The Pre-Wrath position

- a. The Restrainer is Michael the Archangel who steps aside and no longer hinders the Antichrist in his persecution of Israel (**PWR** 256-257).

2. The Pre-Tribulationist position

- a. The Restrainer is some form of human law or government, or the restraining force of the Holy Spirit, which is removed thus allowing sin to have free reign.

- b. Michael the Archangel is hardly the Restrainer since it is Michael who defends Israel during the Tribulation (Daniel 12:1, Revelation 12:7-16). The Pre-Wrath position is the first to even remotely assert that the restrainer is Michael the Archangel.

F. The Nature of the Seven Churches in Revelation 2-3

1. The Pre-Wrath position

- a. The seven churches refer to seven types of churches that will enter the Tribulation.
- b. Only the true church of Philadelphia will experience the deliverance of the rapture (Revelation 3:10) and protection from the Anti-Christ (Bob Van-Kampen tape series on the Pre-Wrath Rapture). All of the other churches in some way compromise the truth (except Smyrna which refers to the martyred saints of the Tribulation).

2. The Pre-Tribulational position

- a. Although there are four ways in which the churches in Revelation 2-3 are understood, the best is that the primary way in which these churches should be understood is that they were historical churches with real problems. A secondary interpretation is that the seven churches refer to seven types of churches, all of which exist throughout the Church age. The least likely interpretation is that they represent church history from the time of the resurrection to the rapture.
- b. In each church there are true believers and tares, except perhaps in the last church of Laodicea which is apostate and has Christ standing on the outside.
- c. The believers in each of the seven churches do not enter the Tribulation since the message to each church is historical and not future.

G. The "Blessed Hope"

1. The Pre-Wrath position

- a. The "Blessed Hope" is deliverance from the Day of the Lord.
- b. The "Blessed Hope" is to be protected from the Antichrist during the Day of the Lord.

2. The Pre-Tribulational position

- a. The "Blessed Hope" is the rapture of the church prior to the start of the Tribulation.

Some Final Remarks

In reading the works put out by the Pre-Wrath Rapturists, one is overwhelmed with the complex logic and reasoning they use to support their position. Although they say over and over again their's is the most natural interpretation of the texts, it is not.

They also resort to the use of a lot of FUD (Fear, Uncertainty, Doubt). They warn their readers who may be pastors of their responsibility to teach their flock of the Pre-Wrath position so that when the tribulation comes their flocks are not caught off-guard and martyred. In fact, these books hint that God will hold these pastors responsible for the death of their listeners if they fail to warn their people of the Antichrist and his program of persecution against the Church. Those who may not have thought through these issues may be tempted to switch to this position out of fear of leading others astray.

Also, the Pre-Wrath Rapturists make a big deal about how their position is the easiest and most natural interpretation of the Biblical passages. This is misleading, as any Rapture position is impossible to prove 100% from the Scriptures. What many do not understand is that if this was such a critical issue of theology, God would have made it a whole lot clearer than it appears to be. God is not out to confuse or trick us into false doctrine, rather, he wants to lead us into all truth. Don't let the rhetoric and hype of the Pre-Wrath Rapturists sway you.

Finally, realize that one's position on the Rapture is not an essential doctrine of the Christian faith in spite of what the Pre-Wrath Rapturists would lead you to believe. One hundred and fifty years ago there was not position on the Rapture at all, since most all of the Church was Classic Post-Millennial in their eschatology. Are we to say all of them lived their entire lives in error and missed God's blessing because of it? What about Spurgeon, Calvin, and others who had no concept of a Rapture? Did they miss heaven? I don't think so.

In conclusion, God has given us a general understanding of the end of the age. We know that Christ returns to this world. We know that he sets up a 1,000 year kingdom which was promised to the Jews in the Old Testament. We know that in the eternal state righteousness will reign. We know about a seven-year period of severe testing at the end of this age. However, when it comes to a blow-by-blow description of each event of the Tribulation, God has not given us that. We know he wins. That should be sufficient.