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**Pre-Tribulationism**

As we come near the end of our Framework study we're developing the various eschatological views. What all the eschatology's do is attempt to take the OT prophetic program and integrate the NT prophetic program into a single, unified picture. Someone asked why are believers coming up with these very different views? One of the reasons is that there are simply a lot of Scriptures involved. Your view may seem obvious but it's not so obvious when you come from different backgrounds or you're taught to read the Bible a different way. So understand that many of these people are sincerely trying to figure out the text. They're not out deliberately maligning and distorting the Scripture. They may be wrong but they are not maliciously wrong. A second reason is that the Church has really only been working on eschatology for about 150 years, and compared to the earlier theological debates, that's not a very long time. The other theological debates often lasted for centuries. A third reason for the different views is the relationship of Israel and the Church. Are they distinct peoples of God or are they the same people of God? This is a controversy the Church didn't really get embroiled in so much as it started developing in theological writings of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. So the Israel-Church issue is central to the debate. And fourth, hermeneutics or your method of interpretation is obviously involved because if Israel and the Church are distinct then you are being literal all the time but if Israel and the Church are the same then you are literal some and allegorical some, so that's a dual hermeneutic. Since the picture for Israel is so different from the picture for the Church we're trying to show how the two pictures relate to one another.

We began the futurist schools by looking at post-tribulationism, post- means after the tribulation. The rapture comes after the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel. Then we dealt with the pre-wrath view, meaning the wrath in this view begins  $\frac{3}{4}$  of

the way into the 70<sup>th</sup> week and so that's when the rapture occurs. Last time we dealt with mid-tribulationism, mid- means middle of the tribulation. The rapture comes at the middle of the 70<sup>th</sup> week.

Drawing a picture of what it looks like, you have the 70<sup>th</sup> week, it lasts seven years, the seven years are divided into two halves, both lasting three and one half years, the last half being called the great tribulation, so they accept the traditional two halves with the second half being technically, the great tribulation. The issue becomes the timing of the rapture and the wrath of God. Since they are mid-tribulation then the rapture comes in the middle of the 70<sup>th</sup> week and that's when the great tribulation starts, which they say corresponds to the wrath of God, the wrath of God is only the great tribulation, the last half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week, the first half is not the wrath of God, it's the wrath of man and the wrath of the Antichrist but not the wrath of God.

So, as far as the rapture and the return notice they do separate them. That's a good feature because the post-tribulationists do not separate them. They put the rapture and the return together as one and the same event. But the pre-wrath and the mid-trib positions at least distinguish the rapture from the return. Granted it's all part of the return in the larger sense of the return, the return can be used narrowly of the 24 hour day Christ returns and puts His feet on the Mt of Olives or broadly of the whole complex of events leading up to that day. That's something in Bible study you have to watch, because you can get a word and you've got to tell from the context how that word is used, whether it's being used in a broad or a narrow sense. The day of the Lord is another term like that, there are places in the OT where it refers to a broad period of judgment and there are times when it refers to just one day of very intense judgment and there are other places where it refers to a long period of blessing that follows. So you can't just take a word and say this is the meaning and then start ramming and cramming everything into this forced scheme. It's more difficult than that because there's a wide usage of some of these terms and it depends on the context. Always go back to context. The first three rules of interpretation, I like to say, are context, context and context.

The way I'm using return is of the narrow 24 hour day and in that sense mid-tribulationism distinguishes between the rapture and the return. Like all the

futurist scenarios mid-tribulationism must deal with the promise to keep the Church from the wrath of God. That's always the question, how do you keep the Church from the wrath of God? If you don't take anything else away from all this take the idea that somehow you have to keep the Church out of destructive path of the wrath of God. The Church is not destined for wrath. So whatever prophecy book you're reading you are always looking for when they start the wrath of God. Once you've identified their answer you know right where they are. Put another way, just because someone says I'm pre-wrath doesn't tell you anything. Mid-tribbers will say they are pre-wrath, they just start the wrath of God at the middle of the trib. Pre-wrath people say they are pre-wrath, they just start it at the  $\frac{3}{4}$  point. Pre-trib people even say they are pre-wrath because they say the entire tribulation is wrath. And even some of the post-trib people would say they are pre-wrath because they allocate all the wrath of God to that one day Jesus returns, although others say some way we will be protected through the wrath of God. But that get's hard to support because believers are dying in the tribulation so how is it they are protected again? So having the rapture pre-wrath is not the issue. What is the issue? When the wrath begins.

Now, the central component of mid-tribulationism which we dealt with was the identification of certain trumps, in particular the last trump of 1 Cor 15:52 with the seventh trumpet of Rev 11:15 which occurs at the mid-point and they bring the trump of 1 Thess 4:16 into the equation, three passages, three trumps, and here's where people can jump to conclusions. Because they hear the word "trumpet" they make the deduction that all three trumps are the last trump. Do you see what they're doing here? If you've got seven trumpets in the book of Revelation that announce seven judgments of God and in 1 Cor 15 you're talking about the last trumpet, it's but a short step of logic to say well then the rapture must be at the seventh trumpet. So what they do is they identify the last trumpet of the rapture with the last of the seven trumpet judgments.

But here's the deal. Are there really no other trumpets after this trumpet? We already know from Matt 24:31 that there will be a trumpet associated with the second return of Christ, that's a post-trib trumpet, so even if you are a mid-tribber you can't say the seventh trumpet is the last of the last because there's another trumpet blowing three and one half years later after the tribulation. And its purpose is to signal the gathering of Israel from the four

corners of the earth. So you have to admit that just because it says last does not necessarily mean last of all time. For example, Zech 14:6-9 depicts the feast of booths occurring yearly throughout the millennial kingdom. And there are trumpet blasts associated with that yearly feast. So we have at least a thousand more trumpets after the so-called last trump. How then can the last trump of 1 Cor 15:52 be the last trump of all time? It's not. That clearly is not what Paul is saying. So he must be saying something else and when we get into pre-tribulationism I might give some options for what he does mean but we're still working with mid-tribulationism.

One of the arguments you want to think about to counter this trumpet identification is the duration of sounding in the seventh trumpet over and against the duration of the last trumpet. The last trumpet is a short blast, it blasts and zap, there's the resurrection of the dead in Christ and immediately after the translation of the living in Christ. It's quick, it happens with extreme rapidity, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye and we're all there together in the air. But the seventh trumpet sounds for the duration of the bowls; the seventh trumpet is the bowls. That's the telescopic structure of the Book of Revelation. The search, if you go into Rev 5 is for one who can take and open the scroll. There's no mention of who can blow any trumpets or who can pour out any bowls. The only issue is the scroll. And if you catch the significance of that as you read on through the book you realize that the trumpets came out of the seals and the bowls came out of the trumpets. So the trumpets and the bowls are wrapped up in the seals. And it's like the nautical telescopes that extend out section by section, section one extends into section two, section two extends into section three and each extension reveals more and more of what was already there but hidden. So if you take that idea of the telescope and think of the seals, trumpets and bowls as extending like that then when the seventh trumpet sounds it is the extension revealing the seven bowls. The point is it's not like the last trump of 1 Cor 15, that's a short blast, this is a long blast, and that makes these two different trumpets.

We could make other arguments against this identification it's just that mid-tribulationism has to make further claims and each one of these piles on the difficulties. For example, they have to show that no wrath of God occurs before the seventh trumpet judgment. In their scheme they have the seals and the trumpets in the first half and the bowls in the second half. The bowls

they say are the great tribulation, that's all in the second half, that's the wrath of God. So you have to show that seals one through six are not the wrath of God and then it gets started with the seventh trumpet—no wrath of God until the seventh trumpet, Rev 11:15. As Harrison says, "...the common mistake of speaking of the Tribulation as a seven-year period. The Bible never so refers to it, rather, it begins in the middle of the seven. It is the latter three and a half years...The first half of the week, or period of seven years, was a 'sweet' anticipation to John..." In other words, John as a Jew is looking forward to this first half because that's cake and ice cream, peace under the Antichrist. Fine, but that peace is not for the whole world, it just refers to the *geopolitical* stability of Israel during that first three and one half years. It has nothing to say about the judgments that *geophysical* instability that is occurring the world over. If the first half is *geophysical* stability then what do you do with Rev 6:17? This is the sixth seal, long before the seventh trumpet, part of verse 16, "hide us from the wrath of the Lamb; 17for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" That's an aorist tense, it's already come, you can't delay this tense to the future when the seventh trumpet sounds. So you've got this statement at the sixth seal and yet Harrison said this period would be "sweet." Well, I don't think these people hiding under rocks think it's too sweet. But that's what mid-tribulationism is forced to assert by delaying the wrath to the mid-point.

Further, they have to find a rapture somewhere in the context of the seventh trumpet of Rev 10-11. So what did we say they seize in order to find a rapture? The two witnesses. How are they a picture of the rapture? Especially since they die? One is supposed to represent the dead in Christ and the other the alive in Christ. So we have a representative rapture. The problem is that this is allegorizing the text. There's no contextual basis for making these guys represent the Church. Where do you come up with that? You didn't get it from the text. The two guys are prophets pronouncing judgment accompanied by great miracles. When did we have that before? In the OT. Remember Moses and Elijah? What did they do? Particularly Elijah. He tried to convict the nation. What do you think these two guys are sent to do? Same thing the OT prophets were sent to do, to prosecute the nation and try to get a conviction. You got to be convicted of your sin in order to believe. And they're instrumental in the salvation of Israel. So they are far from representative of the Church. That is a far out interpretation.

Another criticism, which we've seen before, is that mid-tribulationism destroys imminency because the seven seals and six trumpets have to occur before the rapture. So everything that is prophesied to occur under the seven seals and six trumpets must occur before the rapture. So here again we are waiting for Antichrist, he comes first, then Christ comes, so watch for Antichrist. But the NT says watch for who? Christ.

Finally, a last criticism which we've also seen before is that mid-tribulationism places the Church in Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week which the angel Gabriel said was for Daniel's people and Daniel's city. Last time I checked that referred to the Jews and Jerusalem. So, why do you have the Church in that last week when they were not in the first 69 weeks? It's inconsistent and confuses God's calendar program for Israel with God's calendar-less program for the Church.

Alright, so much for mid-tribulationism. That concludes three of the four futurist views; pre-wrath and mid-tribulationism correctly distinguish the Rapture from the Return so they're right there, they are precise making that distinction, "but continue, like post-tribulationism, to include the Church inside the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel. Once this inclusion occurs, however, the Church is confused with Israel and protection from the wrath of God arises as a problem. All three of these views seek to redefine "wrath" so as to keep it from occurring during the first half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week when the Church is present. In the light of OT revelation of the day of the Lord, these attempted redefinitions of God's wrath fail. The OT makes clear through its discussion of the birth pangs that Jesus adopted in Matthew 24:8, refer to the entire 70<sup>th</sup> Week of Daniel, the entire 70<sup>th</sup> week is a period of God's wrath. Moreover, its purpose is directed to Israel (to produce repentance toward the coming Messiah Jesus) and to the Gentile nations (to divide them on the basis of their response to God's work in Israel), not to the Church."

Alright, let's press on to the fourth view by introducing pre-tribulationism. Pre-tribulationism is diagrammed like this: it recognizes there is a period of tribulation that is predicted for the nation Israel, it recognizes that it is yet future and not past, it observes there are 70 weeks of Daniel, 69 of which have been fulfilled at the Triumphal Entry, after which there is a gap of unknown amount of time prior to the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel. It says the 70<sup>th</sup> week is divided into two halves, the first half begins with the Antichrist

signing a treaty with the leadership of Israel, it lasts three and one half years, then at the mid-point the Antichrist commits the abomination of desolation and the great tribulation begins, lasting for three and a half years for a total of seven years. The birth pangs also last the entire seven years. The day of the Lord is used several different ways in Scripture, first in a broad period of judgment coming upon Israel and the nations, secondly in a narrow day of judgment when Christ returns physically to earth, called the great and terrible day of the Lord. And third a broad period of blessing in the kingdom that lasts 1,000 years. The pre- in pre-tribulationism means the rapture occurs before the tribulation. How long before we don't know. There's no Scripture that reveals how much time between the rapture and the beginning of the tribulation. Dr Walvoord argued that while we do not know for sure it was probably not more than 60 days because when you have prior shifts earlier in Scripture it was only about 30-60 days. For example, the time between the Exodus from Egypt and Mt Sinai is 50 days and the time between the Cross of Christ and Pentecost is 50 days, these aren't long periods of transition. But we don't know exactly how much time is in there, we simply know that the rapture precedes the return of Christ by at least 7 years.

Notice a feature about this view. By doing this, if you look at the chart carefully you'll see that two things immediately occur. First, if the rapture happened before the start of the Tribulation. If that's true, what does that tell you about signs that precede the rapture? There are none. The first event that could serve as a sign is the antichrist makes a covenant or treaty with Israel for seven years, but since the rapture occurs before that then there is no sign preceding the rapture. The rapture then, in pre-tribulationism, and here's a key difference between pre-tribulationism and all other futurist views, in pre-tribulationism the rapture is imminent, meaning that there is no prophesied event that must occur before the rapture occurs, it could occur today, it could occur five years from now, it could occur 100 years from now, there's no way to tell. And church history reports that every generation thought Christ was coming in their generation. Christ has structured history such that no matter where Christians have been living, every generation of Christians has thought that it was their generation in which Christ would return. I find that interesting, especially in light of the fact that post-trib, pre-wrath and mid-trib people all deny imminency by admitting that there must be signs preceding the rapture. Think, if you place the rapture inside

the 70<sup>th</sup> week then necessarily you can predict the rapture. Only in pre-tribulationism is the rapture not a predictable event.

Let's develop that logic a little further. So we say the rapture is not predictable. Now every once in a while you'll get somebody that writes a book and talks about the rapture is going to happen on such and such date. Unfortunately some of them like Hal Lindsey are associated with Dispensationalism and this has given Dispensationalism a bad name; we're still having to deal with the fallout of this. Lindsey said and I'm not just picking on Hal, there are others who have done this, but he said the rapture had to happen in 1981 because the establishment of the nation Israel in 1948 started a prophetic clock ticking. And the clock had to run for 40 years because 40 years is a generation. So if you take 40 and add it to 1948 you get what? 1988. Subtract 7 because the Church has to be raptured pre-tribulational, before the 7 years, so 1988 minus 7 takes you to 1981. That's was his original prediction. When that didn't happen he changed it to 1988 and when that didn't happen he said, well, a generation could be 70 years instead of 40, so now he says it will be in 2018 and if that doesn't happen then maybe 1948 is not what started the prophetic clock ticking, maybe it was 1967 when the Israeli's took Jerusalem, so 2037 for sure, that's the one he says is certain, of course Hal won't be around to see that so it's safe!

Why I take you through that is to say that is not good for Dispensationalism. And it's not consistent with futurist Dispensationalism either because your futurist prophecy *is not* being fulfilled right now. No one who sets dates is a pure futurist because they've got prophecy being fulfilled now, and they see those prophecies as starting the clock ticking, then they set dates. But if it's not ticking, if the things happening now are not fulfillments of prophecy, then you can't set dates. And what did we say when we introduced this whole topic a few months ago? Israel is the one who is on the clock, not the Church. The Church is never put on a clock.

So what are we seeing right now if it's not the fulfillment of prophecy? Well, it's what we call stage setting. The stage is being set, the pieces are being put in place for prophecy to be fulfilled. I mean, there are certain things that have to be in place for prophecy to be fulfilled. These things don't just happen overnight, there's a historical progress that the world has to go through to get all the pieces in place so prophecy can be fulfilled. For example, what kind of

pieces have to be in place for prophecy to be fulfilled? What do we know from prophecy that we can extrapolate back and say this is a piece that has to be in place? First of all, 1948, the establishment of a nation Israel in the land. That is amazing because I know of no other people group that has been exiled from their land for over 2,500 years, ruled by Gentiles and has maintained their national identity and been restored to the land. No other people on earth ever did that. So 1948 is an amazing event. Second, 1967, again, this is amazing, what happened in Israel in 1967? The six day war. Israel took East Jerusalem including the Temple Mount. Up till 1967 the Jordanians controlled East Jerusalem. So during the six day war with Egypt and Syria the Israeli's told the Jordanians, we are not going to initiate an attack against you unless you attack us. Through the course of events however the Jordanian's did attack West Jerusalem and in just three days the Israeli's ran them out and took East Jerusalem. So all of Jerusalem, including the Temple Mount came under Israeli control in 1967. And the Temple Mount has prophetic significance. So 1967 is not a fulfillment of prophecy, nobody's offering sacrifices in a Temple in Jerusalem, but it does have to be under Israeli control. And third, what's just gone on in Operation Iraqi Freedom? There's an ancient city of ruins in Iraq along the Euphrates River that is predicted in Revelation to be re-built. What city is that? Babylon. So with the defeat of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq there have been moves to make Babylon an archaeological park, it's been funded in part by the United States of America, there are some interesting things happening in that region. We live in very exciting times. And behind it all is God's sovereign hand marching history forward. People do what they want to do but God is behind it all. That's why these very interesting things are happening. They are stage setting; they are preparing the way for prophecy to be fulfilled.

But if these things are merely stage setting then the prophecy clock is not ticking and you can't predict the rapture. If you think of them as prophecy fulfilled then you get the clock started. But our responsibility, as we watch all of what is unfolding on the world stage is what? What's the constant admonition of the NT? Be looking for whom? Jesus Christ. Eagerly expect Christ's return for us in the rapture. And there are no signs of that. The next event on the prophetic calendar is Christ's return for us in the rapture. Pieces may be put in place but the NT rapture passages never say when you see Gog and Magog occur know the rapture is near, when you identify the Antichrist know the rapture is right around the corner. You never read that. And that

would put a lot of fear in us but the rapture passages are not fear inducing, it's called the "blessed hope." What kind of blessed hope is it to be looking for Antichrist knowing that he's going to rule the world and you have to live under him? That's not a blessed expectation.

So that's the first very obvious difference between pre-tribulationism and every other futurist view, by moving the rapture out ahead of the tribulation it resolves a problem that we've seen in all the other views, they all deny imminency and place signs before the rapture, they have to. The problem then is how does your view keep the church out of the wrath of God? And every one of them has to come up with a slick maneuver; they either have to divide the wrath up into compartments. Remember, the mid-tribulationist says the seals are the wrath of man, the trumpets are the wrath of Satan and the bowls in the second half, that's the wrath of God and that only. Pre-wrath people slide it all the way to the end, and shorten the great tribulation to just a year and a half or so and they put the wrath of God after the great tribulation. That's very weird because the great tribulation is the worst period of human history according to Jesus and yet in their view it's not even the wrath of God. Then there are the protective mechanism people and they say the Church is on earth during the wrath of God but are protected from the wrath, so that we are in the world but somehow being in the world along with unbelievers, all mixed together, none of the wrath of God comes on them. The pre-tribulationism position alleviates all these problems because it says the wrath of God is the entire 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel, all the seals, all the trumpets, all the bowls and the rapture happens before all that, not a problem.

Next time we'll pick up with the criticisms of pre-tribulationism, surely you know there are criticisms, there are four we'll answer. The key to it is if you stay literal you recognize Israel and the Church are distinct; the rest follows.

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