

The Blessed Hope -- Post Tribulation "Proofs" Examined

The Post-Tribulationist, the Mid-Tribulationist and the "Pre-wrath Rapturist" all see the Rapture in the Olivet Discourse -- as a phase of the coming in glory.

Is the Rapture of the church found in Matthew chapters 24 and 25? There are indications it is not.

24:3. "What shall be the sign of Thy coming?"

The apostles were given signs (Matt. 24:30, 33; Luke 21:25 - 28, and they were urged to look for them; but Paul gives no signs regarding the Rapture. He tells us, "the JEWS require a sign, " but we are to be occupied with Christ Himself (1 Cor. 1:22, 23).

24:13. "But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved."

This message is found only in Matt. 10:22 and 24:13. Both passages have to do with the Tribulation period -- see Matt. 10:23.

During the last half of the Tribulation, unbelieving Israel will flee from the wrath of Satan and Antichrist, finding refuge in the wilderness (Rev. 12:12 - 14). There God will enter into judgment with them, purge out the rebels from among them, and take those who remain after the purging has been completed into the land of Israel. In the land, this remnant will see Christ, recognize Him from the marks of the nails in His hands, mourn over their past unbelief, and be saved (Ezek. 20:33 - 44; Zech. 12:10). It is not that they are to endure until the end of their *lives* to *remain* saved. They are to endure until the end of the *age* (Matt. 24:3) to *become* saved. Their endurance rescues them from being purged as rebels and assures that they will be present when Christ reveals Himself to Israel. The pressures put upon them to go along with the crowd, and take the mark of the Beast, having been resisted, they are *there* when God pours out on them the Spirit of *grace* and of supplications (Zech. 12:10). They become a part of the "all Israel" which is saved (Rom. 11:26). Somewhat similarly, when a man, today, attends an evangelistic service and is saved, his attendance there is not a *work* for salvation, it just places him where he can hear the gospel and be saved by *grace* apart from any works.

These special circumstances fit only one people -- the nation of Israel, and only one time period -- the Tribulation. Paul never makes such a statement concerning the Body of Christ.

24:14. "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (end of the **age** -- see the question in verse 3).

"Jesus came ... preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel*" (Mark 1:14, 15). After Pentecost the message included an actual offer of that kingdom. "Repent therefore, and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that *times of refreshing* [the millennial kingdom] *may come* from the presence of the Lord; and that *He may send Jesus*, the Christ

appointed for you" (Acts 3:19, 20 -- NASB).

The gospel of the kingdom, as preached in early Acts, is similar, but NOT identical, to the "gospel of the circumcision" (Gal. 2:7, 8). After Acts chapter nine (or thirteen?) the twelve apostles preached the gospel of the circumcision, but not the gospel of the kingdom. Israel had been "cast away" (Rom. 11:15) and the kingdom was no longer nigh, nor being offered to them. Also the gospel of the kingdom is NOT the same as "preaching the kingdom of God" (Acts 20:25; 28:31). Paul did proclaim the kingdom of God -- but never the "gospel of the kingdom," nor are we instructed to preach it.

24:31. *"And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."*

There is no mention of either rapture or a resurrection here. It is a gathering together of His elect (living Jewish evangelists -- Rev. 12:17) to "where the action is." Their mission of world evangelism during the Tribulation has been completed, and now they will be assembled at Jerusalem where Christ is returning in glory.

24:32 - 34.

This coming of the Lord is "near," or imminent, only when the Jews "see *all* these things" (24:33). A look at the parallel passage in Luke will be helpful here. In Luke 21:28 the "things" referred to are the signs listed in the preceding verses (Luke 21:10 - 27), not the situation before the Tribulation begins (described in Luke 21:6 - 9), as verse 9 indicates. The generation that sees these signs shall see His coming.

24:37 - 41.

In the days of Noah the flood came and "took them [the wicked] all away," leaving Noah and his family in safety. So in verses 40 and 41 those "taken" are not the righteous ones, but the wicked taken in judgment. While the Greek word translated "took" in verse 39 is "*airo*" and the word for "taken" in verses 40 and 41 is "*paralambano*" they are legitimate synonyms. John F. Walvoord writes, "The fact is that *paralambano* is a common word and is not, in itself, a theological concept. The argument by Reese [Alexander Reese] that it is always used in a friendly sense, however, is destroyed by the fact that the same word is used in John 19:16, 17 in reference to taking Jesus to the Cross, an obvious act of judgment." ¹

In the parallel passage in Luke's Gospel it is very clear that those "taken" are the wicked taken in *judgment*. "And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it shall be also in the days of the Son of Man ... I tell you on that night there will be two men in one bed; one will be *taken*, and the other left. There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be *taken*, and the other left. Two men will be in the field; one will be *taken* and the other left." The disciples then asked a very natural question -- they wanted to know *where* they would be taken. Christ answered them, "Where the body is, there also will the vultures be gathered" (Luke 17:26, 34 - 37 -- NASB). That doesn't sound very much like a description of saints being taken to heaven!

¹"The Rapture Question" by John F. Walvoord, page 189.

As Walvoord remarks, "It states plainly that the ones taken are killed, and their bodies are exposed to the vultures."²

This fits with the parable of the tares, where the tares are removed *first* (Matt. 13:30). By contrast, in the Rapture the believers will (first) be "taken" (up into the air to be with Christ) and the wicked left behind!

25:1 - 12.

As has been pointed out by Post-Trib proponents, the word translated "meet" in Matt. 25:1, 6 is the same word used in 1 Thess. 4:17, concerning the meeting in the air. It is used also in Acts 28:15 of the disciples who went forth to meet Paul at Appius and, evidently, accompanied him as he continued on to their home city -- Rome. Does the word necessarily imply that we go out to meet Christ and then accompany Him back to our origin, earth, rather than to go on to our home in heaven?

The verb form of the Greek word is found in Mark 5:2, 3. "... There met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs." When he met Christ, neither he nor Christ went back to the tombs. Christ boarded a boat and departed to the other side of the sea, and the former demoniac was sent home (though the city had not been his "home" for a long time!) to his friends in the city -- (Mark 5:18 - 20). Therefore the word does not necessitate a return to the place of origin.

I fail to find any trace of the Body of Christ or the Rapture in these chapters.

"Can we really imagine the first century believers being divided into two camps with regard to Christ's coming? On the one side, those instructed by Christ and the twelve apostles would be Post-Tribulationists, and on the other side, those instructed by Paul would be Pre-Tribulationists? ... Can our minds visualize them passing each other on the street with the exchange of greetings 'Maranatha Pre' and 'Maranatha Post'?"³

While not essential to the Pre-Trib position, nor a teaching about which one can be dogmatic one way or the other, the view that The Twelve, and others who were in *Christ* before Paul, were not taken into the *Body of Christ*, offers a solution to this problem. In this case, of course, these kingdom saints would not be Pre-Tribulationists, for *their* hope would be the coming in glory. There were important differences between these two groups of believers. For example, the Jews continued to practice circumcision, though admitting there was no need for the Gentiles to do so (Acts 21:24, 25). They were all zealous for the Law (Acts 21:20), while Paul was teaching that the Law was done away in Christ (2 Cor. 3:3 - 11) and we are not under it. (Rom. 6:15).

In any case it is a mistaken idea that the twelve apostles were Post-Trib. They did not have the Rapture in view at all! We believe the *Rapture* will occur *before* the Tribulation: they

² Ibid. Page 190.

³ A leaflet "Does Holy Scripture Teach That Christ Will Return Before the Great Tribulation?" by Henry Hudson, page 4.

believed Christ would *come in GLORY after* the Tribulation. Both statements are TRUE! The apostles were not Post-Trib. They did not even seek to establish a relationship between the Rapture on the one hand and the coming in glory on the other. They ignored the Rapture and left that teaching to Paul, to whom it had been revealed.

"If ... the book of Acts can be regarded as recording some kind of transition, why is it so impossible that the last days of this age should witness another transition as God sets the scene in Israel and Jerusalem for the days of Jacob's trouble?"⁴

There are several good reasons for no "transition" period at the close of this age of grace:

-- Unlike the situation in mid-Acts, this age does not close by removing an offer to a people -- but by removing the *people!* Most of those New Testament Israelites who were saved before Paul were still present as this age got under way. When God returns to His program with Israel, the Body of Christ *will not be here!*

-- While the beginning of this age was an event, not a process, a completely new program was then instituted and it took time for the truths to be revealed, taught, understood, and implemented. When God goes back to Israel, He will be taking up where He left off -- with a program already well known and documented. Let me illustrate. If someone introducing you to a stranger interrupts your conversation with a friend, your contact with this new acquaintance is instantaneous, but it takes some time to get a satisfactory conversation going with him (a transition). However, in returning to your interrupted fellowship with your friend after the stranger leaves, you can return to your conversation at once -- right where you left off (no transition).

-- God may be laying a foundation for the Tribulation events during the last part of this age -- but this is not a transition. God was preparing Paul for his ministry in the age of grace from the time he was born (Gal. 1:15, 16), but the transition period did not begin with the birth of Saul of Tarsus!

"Now we all agree that there will be believers present during this period [the Tribulation]. Who are they and where do they come from? Let us remember that according to the Pre-Trib theory, every single believer is caught up and none left. Imagine! The whole world without any kind of believing remnant! What a predicament!"⁵

What human witness was present to lead Saul of Tarsus to the Lord? What human instruments are credited with the conversion of all Israel in Zech. 12:10? God delights to use men, but He is not helpless without them.

However, if the believers were caught away today, current witnessing among the Jews (which is taking place on an unprecedented scale) could, under the power of the Holy Spirit, bring a harvest after the witnesses were gone. Books, Bibles, magazines, and taped messages would still be here to bear a not totally silent, and very effective, testimony. Christian programs aired over secular radio and television stations could go on for some time, since they are usually taped in advance and supplied to the stations far ahead of scheduled broadcasting. God is surely able to bring 144,000 men to Himself at the beginning of the Tribulation if He can bring a whole

⁴ Ibid. Page 11.

⁵ Ibid. Page 17.

nation to Himself in a day at its close (Zech. 12:10; Isa. 66:8; Rom. 11:26).

To assume the ministry of the Body of Christ is necessary during the Tribulation is to read something into the book of Revelation. Not only is there no mention of the Body of Christ in the book, but all *formal ministry* mentioned there is carefully and specifically said to be through angels (Rev. 14:6) or *Jews* (Rev. 2:9; 3:9; 7:4 - 8; 11:3; 12:17; 14:1 - 5). The natural branches have been grafted back into their own Olive tree,⁶ and the wild Olive branches have been broken off. Of course multitudes of Gentiles will be saved during this time and will have a powerful, though brief, personal testimony (Rev. 6:9 - 11; 7:9, 10, 13, 14), but they will evidently not be in places of leadership (see Rom. 11:21 - 24).⁷

There is a very real problem for the Post-Trib position that is related to the above considerations. Having no believers on earth following a Pre-Trib Rapture is not as great a problem as having only raptured believers entering the Kingdom. If the Rapture takes place at the close of the Tribulation, then all believers during that time will be "changed" and will have bodies like the resurrection body of Christ (Phil. 3:21). If no unbelievers enter the Kingdom, then who will continue to have children during that time (Isa. 65:20 - 23)? If the Rapture is Pre-Trib this is no problem, for there is no record of living saints entering into changed bodies (having put on immortality -- 1 Cor. 15:53) at the transition from the Tribulation to the kingdom. Any saints having lived through the Tribulation, and the "all Israel" saved at its close, would live on into the millennial kingdom and populate it.

"If we read verses 25 - 27 [of Romans 11] we can readily apprehend the terminal point of the 'fulness of the Gentiles' ... it certainly is not before the Tribulation. The condition of blind unbelief continues right up till the Deliverer comes out of Sion."⁸

Romans 11:25, 26 informs us that Israel will not recover from her blindness (*judicial* blindness, not just "blind unbelief" -- Rom. 11:7, 25), and enter into a national salvation, until after the "full number of the ingathering of Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25 -- Amplified Bible) during this age of grace. If the fulness of the Gentiles refers to the number to be included in the Body of Christ, then this fulness will have been reached at the Rapture. If it is speaking of the number of *all* Gentiles to be *saved*, it could not be concluded until the end of the Millennium, for a great multitude of Gentiles will be saved during the Tribulation (Rev. 7:9, 14) and countless others during the 1,000 years following (Isa. 66:19).

These verses do NOT say that as soon as the Body of Christ is complete all Israel will be saved. It is not the completion of the Body which brings about that national salvation, but the return of Christ Himself (Rom. 11:26, 27 with Zech. 12:10).

God's program with Israel was not broken off just before their conversion, but just before

⁶ "For the Olive tree is not the symbolism of a heavenly calling, but of the place of earthly testimony, and the 'natural branches' of the Olive tree are the covenant people." -- "Forgotten Truths" by Sir Robert Anderson, page 15.

⁷ See the study concerning the Olive tree passage in Romans 11 as set forth in the chapter on the Acts 28 position.

⁸ From a leaflet, "Does the Holy Scripture Teach That Christ Will Return Before the Great Tribulation?" by Henry T. Hudson, page 10.

they were about to enter the "time of Jacob's trouble," which they richly deserved because they had fully rejected the risen Christ. So when this intervening age is concluded, God will take up where He left off. It will not be followed immediately by the salvation of all Israel, but by the time of trouble that will *lead to* that salvation. "I will go away and return to My place Until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; **In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me**" (Hosea 5:15 NASB)

During the entire Tribulation God will be seeking to bring Israel, as a nation, to Himself. This is not what He is doing today. Now He is endeavoring to bring SINNERS to Himself. The individual Jews must take their place beside the Gentiles to receive salvation (Acts 15:10, 11). When this age of grace has been terminated, then God will lift the *judicial* blindness from their *still unbelieving hearts* and begin to work toward the salvation of all Israel. The end of the blindness, and the chastening of the Tribulation, will prepare them for the time of grace and supplications (Zech. 12:10). And so all Israel shall be saved -- *AFTER* the Rapture, but *NOT AT THE SAME TIME* as the Rapture.

"How simple it is to believe that the 'first resurrection' of Revelation is the first. The Pre-Trib theory would make such language meaningless. How easy and natural to take the last trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52 to be the last, instead of being caught with seven more after it."⁹

Both the resurrection of Christ Himself and of the saints raised with Him (Matt. 27:52) come before the "first resurrection," as that resurrection is defined by brother Hudson. So there is already a resurrection before the first resurrection, unless the first resurrection be understood to include all who are raised to life -- in contrast to the one where the lost are raised unto condemnation (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28, 29). In this case the Rapture is rightly seen as an unprophesied part of the first resurrection.

As to the "last trump," notice other uses of the word for "last." "And last of all He was seen of me also" (1 Cor. 15:8). This is not the last time Christ will be seen, but the last appearance at that time and in that series of appearances. So "the last error" (Matt. 27:64) does not mean there can never be any more errors. It was the last of those under consideration, not the last absolutely. In Heb. 1:2 the present time is called the last days, but in 2 Tim. 3:1 the last days are seen as being in the future. So we have last days after last days. 1 Pet. 1:5 speaks of the last time as future, but 1 John 2:18 tells us, "It is the last time." Here we have the last time after the last time.

Surely simplicity must give way to accuracy.

"According to Darby and his followers, the Great Tribulation is the wrath of God against the Jewish people for their rejection of CHRIST. According to the Scripture, it is the Devil's wrath against the saints for their rejection of ANTI-CHRIST, and adherence to Christ. Let the reader once see the Scripture truth on this point, and the whole Darbyist case will be exposed as a campaign of assumption, mis-statements, and sentiment."¹⁰

⁹ Ibid. Pages 5, 6.

¹⁰ Alexander Reese -- Cited by J. Dwight Pentecost in "Things to Come," Academy

Israel was already under the wrath of God before Paul wrote First Thessalonians, and it continues on them all through, and until the end of, the Tribulation. In 1 Thess. 2:15, 16 (NIV) he speaks of the Jews "Who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God **has come** upon them at last" In the Greek "at last" is *eis telos* -- "to [the] end." So the wrath of God began with their formal rejection of the risen Christ (at Acts seven evidently), and will continue to the end of the Tribulation when they will turn to the Lord and will be saved. If this age had not been inserted into a break in the prophetic program the wrath of God begun at Acts seven would have taken them very shortly into the Tribulation to find its conclusion at Christ's return in glory.

Also, God has always felt free to use men, or even Satan, to express His wrath -- and has reckoned it as *His* wrath. Consider:

- The things which came on Job were specifically the outpouring of Satan's wrath, yet
- What happened at the Cross was surely due to the wrath of both men and Satan (Matt. 27:20; Gen. 3:15), yet Isaiah says, "But the *Lord* was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief" (Isa. 53:10 -- NASB).
- It is the "*Lamb*" who opens the seals which introduce judgments near the beginning of the Tribulation (Rev. 6:1, 2 and following).
- It appears that Revelation 19:11 - 21 and Ezekiel 38:21 have the same battle in view. The former passage represents Christ and His holy ones as destroying the armies, while the latter indicates God will use man against man in the battle. "I will call for a sword against him throughout all my holy mountain, saith the Lord God; every man's sword shall be against his brother."
- In Rev. 16:19 it says, "... and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of *His* wrath." Yet, see how the judgment is described in chapter 17. "And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the Beast [ten kings, see Rev. 17:12], these shall hate the harlot [Babylon, see Rev. 17:5] and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfill *His will*" (Rev. 17:16, 17). This judgment is described in detail in Rev. 18, and it bears all the marks of an atomic attack. Here man's wrath is referred to as "His [*God's*] wrath."
- The "strong delusion" and "the lie" in 2 Thess. 2:11 are directly the result of Satan's work, but they are said to be sent by God to accomplish His purpose in judgment (2 Thess. 2:12).
- The very satanic wrath described in Rev. 12:12 (and used as the basis for Alexander Reese's statement quoted above) is focused on Israel (the "woman"), and is instrumental in driving her into the wilderness to find a place of safety (Rev. 12:13, 14). In Ezekiel 20:34, 35 God describes this same flight of Israel into the wilderness, He writes, "I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with *fury poured out*. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people." God is using the very wrath of Satan which Post-Tribulationists put into contrast with "the wrath of God," takes responsibility for it, and identifies it as **HIS FURY**.

The Lord does not make such a hard and fast contrast between the Tribulation as "Satan's

wrath" and a later short period as "God's wrath." Israel will recognize the Lord's hand in the afflictions they will endure during the Tribulation. "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their *affliction* they will seek me early [saying] Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for *He hath torn*, and He will heal us; *He hath smitten*, and He will bind us up." (Hosea 5:15; 6:1)

If (as the Post-Tribulationists teach) members of the Body of Christ are present on earth during the Tribulation:

-- They will have a different message to proclaim. During that time the "gospel of the kingdom" will be preached -- not only to Israel (as it was during the Gospel period, and the first few chapters of Acts) -- but to "all nations," the Gentiles (Matt. 24:14). This message is not just "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ" (as Paul did -- Acts 28:31), but is proclaiming that the *millennial kingdom is soon to be established*. This message we do not preach today.

-- They will have a different program. There will again be a sharp distinction drawn between Jew and Gentile (Rev. 2:9; 3:9 -- Contrast Rom. 3:22; 10:12; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:14). Men will be judged for eating unclean meats (Isa. 66:17¹¹ -- Contrast 1 Tim. 4:3 - 5). They will be subject to the law of the Sabbath (Matt. 24:20 -- Contrast Gal. 4:9 - 11; Col. 2:16, 17). They will be practicing water baptism (Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38 -- Contrast 1 Cor. 1:17; Eph. 4:5). They will again have signs, wonders, and miracles as an integral part of the ministry (Acts 2:18 - 20; Rev. 11:5, 6, 11, 12 -- Contrast 1 Cor. 12:13, 14¹²).

-- They will have no recognition as the Body of Christ. This term is not used even once either in Revelation or the General Epistles (Heb. 13:3 is a reminder that those addressed are still living "in the [physical] body" and may, themselves, be the next to suffer). In the book of Revelation there is no reference back to Paul's teaching. This indicates Paul will have no authority over the message being preached or the program being carried on at that time. This is very striking in view of the many Old Testament references which are found in Revelation, and the emphasis given to the authority of Paul in his epistles (Rom. 16:13; 1 Cor. 14:27; Eph. 3:2 - 4; Col. 1:25, 26; 1 Thess. 2:13; etc.). In Second Timothy, where Paul has the last days specifically in view, there is no mention of a change in message or program, but a challenge to continue preaching the things they have already heard from him (2:1) with an emphasis on their Pauline source (3:14).

-- If one wants to see how the Body of Christ fails to fit the Tribulation scene he need but read Paul's epistles straight through, followed by a one-sitting reading of the book of Revelation. Too much attention to individual verses and proof texts may blind us to the overall picture in each case. We may miss the forest by looking too closely at the trees.

¹¹ Isaiah sixty-six has the Tribulation, and the salvation and blessing of Israel at its close, specifically in view. Compare Isa. 66:7, 8 with Rev. 12:1 - 6, 13 - 17 and Micah 5:3. Compare Isa. 66:15, 16 with 2 Thess. 1:7 - 9.

¹² See the study on the miraculous gifts in this volume.