

Defending The Pre-trib Rapture by Todd Strandberg

After reading countless messages and articles that attack the pre-trib rapture, I've noticed a certain number of arguments that are repeatedly sent to me.

Instead of trying to answer every individual e-mail I receive, I thought it would be a good idea to create a web page that addresses the most commonly mentioned points of debate. This way, I can avoid repeating myself so many times; thereby, maintain my sanity.

Nowhere in the Bible, can you find the word "rapture"

It amazes me that some folks write to me, questioning the validity of the rapture, simply because the word "rapture" doesn't appear in the Bible.

With 1 Thes 4:16-18 giving us such a clear description of the rapture, you would have to conclude that some people are just playing games with the Word of God. I could change the name of my site to "Catching Up Ready" to satisfy these folks, but I hardly think that would improve things.

Their logic fails because there are a huge number of words that don't appear in the Bible, including the word "Bible." Because God's Word was originally written in Hebrew and Greek, one could truthfully say that no English words are in the Bible. Let's take a look at 1 Thes 4:16-18 in the original Greek:

4:16 oti autos o kurios en keleusmati en fwnh arcaggelou kai en salpiggi qeou
katabhsetai ap ouranou kai oi nekroi en cristw anasthsontai prwton 4:17 epeita hmeis oi
zwntes oi perileipomenoi ama sun autois arpaghsomeqa en nefelais eis apanthsin tou
kuriou eis aera kai outws pantote sun kuriw esomeqa 4:18 wste parakaleite allhlous en
tois logois toutoiois

I don't see the dead in Christ rising, Jesus descending from heaven, and us meeting Him in the air. So the cynics are right: the word "rapture" is nowhere to be found. All I see is gobbledegook.

For the record, the word "rapture" comes from the Latin word "rapturo," which in turn was a translation of the Greek verb "caught up" found in 1 Thes 4:17. You can call it the pre-trib rapture, the pre-trib rapturo, or the pre-trib caught up--it's all the same thing.

Nowhere in the Bible does it directly say that the Church will be raptured before the tribulation.

Pre-trib opponents should have thought this one through because any pre-tribulationist has the same right to say, "Nowhere in the Bible does it directly say the Church will go through the tribulation."

Jesus did say, "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24:44). The only time frame I can think of when we believers would not be expecting Jesus to return would have to be before the tribulation.

The Margaret MacDonald Origin

One of the most widely circulated attacks against the pre-trib rapture is the notion that a girl named Margaret MacDonald started this theological view back in 1830. The claim is typically made that MacDonald received a demonic vision, passed it on to John Darby, who in turn popularized it. Disproving this assertion proves rather easy. Pre-trib scholars have discovered a host of rapture writings that predate Margaret MacDonald.

Epharaem the Syrian said, in 373 AD, "For all the saints and Elect of God are gathered, prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins."

One post-trib author offered a reward to anyone who could find a quote that predated MacDonald. He had to quickly cough up the money when someone identified a scholar who wrote about the pre-trib rapture several years before MacDonald. As of late, dozens of examples have been found, and the literary surface has hardly been scratched.

With the revealing of all these pre-MacDonald writings, you would think that this argument has been debunked. Unfortunately, this is not the case. We seem to be involved in a tug-of-war with the truth. Apparently, due to their lack of research, pre-trib opponents continue to pump out publications that cite MacDonald as the originator of the pre-trib rapture.

The Last Trumpet Argument

Because Paul, in 1 Cor. 15:52 and 1 Thes 4:16, said believers would be raptured at the sounding of a trump, many folks have tried to make it appear that the rapture trumps are the same trumpets found in Revelation 11:15-18, Joel 2:1, and Mat 24:31--which all occur during the tribulation.

When you have trumpets commonly used throughout the Bible, I think it's foolish to just assume any two of the 62 trumps or trumpets are prophetically related. To be able to make the claim that the tribulation trumpet soundings are the same as the rapture trumps, you would need a direct statement saying this is the case.

In the movies Ben-Hur and The Wizard of Oz, I recall hearing the sounding of trumpets. Are both these trumpets somehow prophetically related?

If your friend John said he went to his favorite restaurant last night, and another friend Larry said he also went to his favorite restaurant last night, is it logical for you to assume they both went to the same restaurant? Obviously not, because even though John and Larry went to their favorite restaurants, they may have had two different eating establishments in mind. The same logic should apply with the word trumpet.

With such a blind devotion to this one similarity, I have to wonder if these last-tumpeters are able to distinguish the difference between Tylenol and Exlax. They're both over-the-counter drugs, they come in pill form, and they can also be found in a medicine cabinet. Of course, one will make your headache disappear and the other will make your toilet paper disappear.

Pre-wrath proponents say that the Seventh Trumpet blown in Rev 11:15-18 is the same last trump Paul spoke of in 1 Cor 15:52. However, they fail to take into account the fact that John wrote Revelation 40 years after Paul wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians. How could Paul refer to something that was not yet revealed?

Post-tribbers use a trumpet sounding in Joel 2:1 as evidence for a post-trib rapture on the Day of the Lord. I have three problems with Joel 2:1:

1. Joel clearly says that the purpose for blowing the trumpet is to "sound an alarm."
2. According to 1 Cor 15:52, the rapture is something that occurs in the twinkling of an eye. Joel 2:1 says the Day of the Lord is nigh at hand. In order for Joel's trumpet to be the same one in 1 Cor. there would have to be a time delay between the sounding of the trumpet and the rapture of the Church.
3. The fact that there is another trumpet being sounded in Joel 2:15 further clouds the possibility that these trumpets could have anything to do with the rapture.

When Paul was writing to the Corinthians, he specifically said "the" last trump. During the Feast of Trumpets, the Jews blow short trumpet blasts. They end the feast with a long blast from what is called the last trump, which is blown the longest. Judaism has traditionally connected this last trump with the resurrection of the dead. Paul also made the connection. For many Christians, the association between the rapture and the Feast of Trumpets is so strong, they look for the rapture to someday occur on this feast.

The Day of the Lord Argument

A number people have attempted to refute the pre-trib rapture by trying to associate the "Day of the Lord" with a catching-up of believers at the end of the tribulation. They base their rapture views solely on the idea that the "Day of the Lord" and the rapture are either synonymous or somehow linked together.

The Achilles heel of their argument has to be the notion that the "Day of the Lord" and various other "days" of an end-time context refers to a 24 hour period that occurs at or

near the end of the tribulation. Probably the most commonly cited verse is 1 Thessalonians 5:2 where Paul tells us the "Day of the Lord" will come "as a thief in the night."

I've read countless articles that describe the "Day of the Lord" as Christ's advent at Armageddon. These articles go on to say that, because Paul also tells us the Lord will come "as a thief," we have a direct link to the same description that is applied to noted rapture verses.

It's rather obvious that those trying to rely on the "Day of the Lord" never bothered to validate the meaning of this particular day. I've checked a number of commentaries on the "Day of the Lord" and many of them define this as being an all-encompassing period that begins with the Great Tribulation. Let's examine some verses that clearly indicate that the term "day" is used to represent a broader time period.

II Peter 3:10-13

The "Day of the Lord" Peter spoke of in second Peter, cannot be a one day event because it mentions the destruction of the earth by fire and its renovation. Rev 21:11 tells us the earth will not be renewed until after Christ's 1000 year reign.

Joel 2:11-20

The "Day of the Lord" Joel describes, includes the defeat of the northern army. Ezk. 38 and 39 is parallel passage. Most scholars would time the destruction of the Gog army as occurring before in the first half of the tribulation.

John 12:48

In the book of John, Jesus uses the term "last day" to indicate when the lost would be judged. Rev 20 makes it clear that the unsaved will not be judged until after the millennium--yet another 1000 year gap.

Hebrews 10:25

One of the best indications that most of the various "day" references are citing a general time period can be found in Hebrews 10:25: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

Surely, Paul would not be warning us to watch for a day that would be coming at the end of the tribulation. That type of logic would be like warning children, as they cross the road, to watch out for tail lights.

The First Resurrection

I've heard some folks say, "There cannot be a pre-trib rapture because to have one would require a second resurrection at Christ's return to earth." This conclusion is drawn from Revelation 20:

"But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on

such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev 20:5-6).

One pre-trib writer, explaining this passage, said, "The first did not mean first in time, but rather first in kind." The first resurrection was for God's people the second will be for the unsaved.

A quick way to shoot down the notion that the first resurrection is tied to a specific date, as opposed to a more general time frame, is to take note of the tribulation rapture of the two witnesses and the 144,000 Jewish evangelists. At the mid-point of the tribulation, the two witnesses are killed by the Antichrist, resurrected by God, and then caught up into heaven (Rev 11:3-12).

Revelation chapter 7 describes the sealing of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists just before the Beast issues his mark. Sometime during the latter half of the tribulation, Revelation chapter 14 indicates they will be "redeemed from the earth," standing before the throne of God.

Confusion over Confusion: 2 Thes 2:1-6

Because Paul, in 2 Thessalonians, said the Antichrist would be revealed before the Day of the Christ, post and pre-wrath adherents frequently try to cite this passage as one that refutes the pre-trib rapture.

To quell the Thessalonian's misunderstanding that they had somehow entered the tribulation, Paul told them the Antichrist must first be revealed. By telling them they had no reason to panic, Paul is clearly disputing the idea that the Thessalonians could someday find themselves facing the tribulation hour.

I'm constantly being irked by Post-trib and pre-wrath folks' consistent, or better yet deliberate, failure to accept the simple fact that the pre-trib doctrine calls for a rapture and a second coming. Because they only glean the prophetic word for one event--the second coming--they're unable to recognize pre-trib rapture passages.

Of course, when you fuse the two advents together, you end up with verses that appear to contradict each other: 1 Thessalonians 5:9, "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ," and Revelation 13:7, "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations."

Reverse Logic Stuck In Reverse

Many people are against the pre-trib rapture simply because they see it as being the dominant view on the timing of Christ's return for the Church. The anti-pretribulationists often think they are the last remaining true believers. I'm simply dumbfounded over why some people choose rebellion against the majority view as their guide for finding truth.

The measurement of popularity alone is a terrible way to determine something's validity. It is particularly strange when people solely rely on the contrarian view to judge truth from fiction. I utilize contrarian views all the time to help determine what is truthful; however, it would be a terrible mistake on my part if I made Contrarianism the core foundation of any of my beliefs.

If you're using reverse logic, you need to support your conclusions. The vast majority of the population would agree that apples grow on apple trees and cherries grow on cherry trees. The pure novelty of the opposite being true does not in any way help make it so. Unless you see farmers gluing apples onto cherry trees or picking cherries from apple trees, you have no basis to think that these two fruits do not grow on anything but the trees that share the same name.

Some people are clearly more in love with the idea of a conspiracy than they are the truth. Every time an airplane crashes to the earth there's someone who will proclaim it was caused by anything from an act of terrorism to a bizarre government plot. It's just not exciting enough to say it was a mechanical problem that led to the crash.

The idea that the pre-trib rapture is the dominant view is not correct in the first place. Most evangelicals would say they look for a pre-trib rapture, but if you include all Christians, pretribulationists would rank third behind post-trib and preterist adherents.

Persecute Me Please

You would think the desire to go through the tribulation would be as popular as the desire to jump into a pit filled with vipers and broken glass. As illogical as it may seem, there appears to be a large number of Christians that fully expect to get roughed up before Christ returns.

Many Christians argue strongly for the right to suffer persecution at the hands of the Antichrist and the one world government. These tribulation saint wannabees constantly harp, "Because Jesus and His disciples suffered persecution, we should expect no better." It's been my experience that people with the weakest faith are generally the ones that talk the boldest. When the slightest difficulty comes their way, they cry to high heaven.

I hate to be the bearer of good news, but the word of God clearly states that believers will escape the tribulation bloodbath. "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thes 5:9). "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Rev 3:10).

In one regard, people who think the Church will go through the tribulation are somewhat correct. I believe there will be a huge number of "carnal Christians" that will find themselves left behind. By having the rapture before the tribulation, all those who find themselves facing the wrath of God will be without an excuse.

No Secret Rapture

"There is no secret rapture" is the beginning declaration of a large percentage of messages that attack the rapture. Rarely is this statement backed by supporting scriptural evidence. A few people will cite Rev 1:17, "every eye shall see him," as proof that the rapture will not be a secret event. Of course, I would immediately note that "every eye shall see him" is the second coming.

I have a hard time understanding how these folks could think pretribulationists preach a secret rapture. We seem to be doing our very best to popularize the rapture before it takes place. I doubt that, afterwards, with all the car wrecks, plane crashes, and missing persons reports, the rapture will remain a secret occurrence.

The only people I know who are attempting to keep the pre-trib rapture a secret are its critics. Pre-wrath and post-trib folks have the national media and the liberal churches as their allies in their ongoing effort to silence all knowledge of the "blessed hope."

No Imminency

Because an imminent or any moment rapture is one of the major teachings of pre-tribulationists, opponents of this view attempt to dismantle the imminency of the rapture.

Although Jesus said, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Mat 24:42), advocates for knowing the "day" will claim this only applies to the unsaved. I hear arguments like, "Surely a loving father would tell his own children when he's coming for them."

To try to get around "no man know the hour," a popular scripture often cited is: "But yea brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief" (1 Thes 5:4).

Despite all their monkeying with scripture, pre-trib detractors just cannot escape Jesus' restriction against knowing the timing of the rapture. In fact, our Lord was so restrictive about the rapture, He said its occurrence would come as a total surprise. "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 24:44).

Now as far as the second coming goes, the Bible couldn't be plainer. It clearly states that Jesus will return 1260 days from the moment the Antichrist sits in the Temple of God and declares himself to be God. Because there exists both a known and an unknown date, many scholars have logically concluded that there must be two different events occurring--the rapture and the second coming.

The Restrainer

In 2 Thessalonians the Apostle Paul speaks of a "he" that will restrain the advent of the Antichrist. The restrainer's removal is required before the Antichrist can be revealed.

2 Thessalonians 2:6-8, "And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only **he** who now letteth will let, until **he** be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming."

A debate has erupted over the identity of the Restrainer because if this "he" is the Holy Ghost, the only real explanation for his removal would be the rapture of the Church, which is indwelled by him. The strongest argument offered against the Holy Spirit being the Restrainer is the belief that if God's Spirit was ever removed from the earth, no one could then be saved. The removal of the Holy Ghost does not have to be an all or nothing proposition. I believe his being "taken out of the way" will only be a degree of removal.

Before the Church Age, people were able to find salvation, which obviously meant the Holy Spirit was at work on earth. When the outpouring of the Holy Ghost occurred at Pentecost, we didn't have a second Holy Spirit come to earth. His removal at the rapture will only be a reversal or ending of the Pentecostal outpouring.

Replacementism

Because Revelation places a strong emphasis on Israel during the tribulation, and not on the church, most post-tribulationists have adopted a replacement theology view in order to maintain the focus on them.

Replacementism is the view that Israel, having failed God, has been replaced by the Church. The Church is now seen as spiritual Israel and spiritual Jerusalem. This teaching claims that all the promises and blessings, in fact Israel's entire inheritance, now belongs to the Church. However, all is not lost for Israel; it gets to keep all the curses.

Dispensational theology, taught by nearly all pre-tribulationists, teaches that God has separate strategies for dealing with the Church and the Jews. When you consider the change in focus, during the tribulation, from the Church to Israel, the pre-trib rapture provides a good explanation for this transfer of attention.

To say that Israel is no longer God's chosen people is really playing with fire because the Antichrist will likely be saying the same thing when he tries to destroy the Jews during the tribulation. I look for people that hold to replacementism to be in the cheering section when the Beast goes on his Jew-killing campaign. "The Lord will not reject his people; he will never forsake his inheritance" (Psalm 94:14).

"This is what the Lord says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar - the Lord Almighty is his name: 'Only if these decrees vanish from my sight,' declares the Lord, 'will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me'" (Jeremiah 31:35-36).