

The Failure of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Scheme

by Raymond C. Faircloth

When, in 1830, **Margaret MacDonald** had the visions that told her that Christians would not have to experience the Great Tribulation because they would be raptured to heaven immediately before this event and that Jesus could return at any moment to accomplish this rapture the teaching came to be called the pre-tribulation rapture. However, this teaching contradicts the following biblical teachings:

1. Jesus **returns once** so there is no 7 seven year gap between his *parousia* (*coming*) and his *apokalipsis* (*revelation*).
2. Jesus will only leave heaven when his enemies are to be **his footstool** (Acts 2:34-35). This means that he will only leave heaven the one time and not as pre-tribulationists propose.
3. Christians are to be raptured at the same time **as the wicked get destroyed** (2Thess. 1: 6-10) and note the examples of Noah's flood and Lot's rescue-Luke 17:26-30).
4. Christians are not to be raptured to God's location **in heaven** for 7 years (or even a few years), but will be caught away **into the earth's atmosphere** for a relatively short time as part of Jesus' descent to earth (1 Thess. 4:17).
5. There must be **events which precede** the coming of Christ because he said there would be a sign for his return for which Christians must watch. Therefore the rapture cannot be imminent.
6. Paul said that **Antichrist** must be revealed first before "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:1-3).
7. Christians must **experience the Great Tribulation**. Therefore the resurrection cannot be pre-tribulationist.
8. There is **no 7 year tribulation** period with "the Great Tribulation" being the latter half. There is only an approximately 3½ year "Great Tribulation" (See STUDY 9).
9. **The Day of the Lord**, is separate from and follows immediately on the heels of "the Great Tribulation."
10. "Armageddon" is simply the place for the gathering of the nations to fight Christ. It is not the key event as such. The key event is the Battle for Jerusalem.
11. Jesus' foretold wars, famines, lawlessness, and earthquakes are not the global and general ones but are specific to the **antichrist's activities in the Middle-east** (Daniel 11) in the end-time. So Britain and the USA do not have any major role at that time. Furthermore, the European Community does not fulfil the role of the final antichrist empire.

Answering Pre-Tribulationist Arguments

COULD THE RAPTURE OCCUR AT ANY MOMENT?

This could not happen in the apostles' time because:

- Jesus had stated that Peter would reach old age and die before Jesus returned (John 21:18-23).
- Paul expected imprisonment, sufferings and a visit to Rome before Jesus' return.
- The elders in Ephesus were to expect "*ravenous wolves*." Yet they all entertained the coming of Christ as a "*present hope*"; "*the blessed hope*."

The any moment rapture scheme produces a secret rapture. Yet there were many signs that God gave for the first coming of Jesus. Why would God want the second coming of Messiah to be secretive?

WHAT ABOUT THE THIEF PASSAGES?

These emphasize the suddenness and unexpected nature of Jesus' second coming for those who are unprepared [*not watching*], and not any silence or secrecy:

- ❖ "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that **the day overtake you like a thief**" (1 Thess. 5:4).

This shows that the day will overtake ‘watching’ Christians who are not in darkness, but unlike those who are not watching, Christians will not be caught unawares as though by a thief. This actually shows that Christians must still be on earth up to the “*day of Christ*.”

- ❖ “**If you do not wake up** I will come like a thief and *you will not know at what hour* I will come to you”
(*Rev. 3:3*).
- ❖ “(Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who **stays awake**, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed)” (*Rev. 16:15*)

All of these passages show the need for constant spiritual wakefulness, not only during the Great tribulation, but at all times.

- ❖ “But if the head of the house had known what time of the night *the thief* was coming, he would have **been on the alert** and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason **you must also be ready**; for the Son of Man is **coming at an hour when you do not think he will**”
(*Matt. 24:43, 44*). See also Luke 12:39, 40.

Christians can never set a date for the return of Jesus. However, within the last 3½ years in Daniel’s 70th ‘seven’ those who are ‘watching’ and wakeful Christians will become aware that Jesus’ return will be soon, although still not knowing ‘the day or the hour.’ This is further indicated in Jesus’ parable of “the fig tree”:

- ❖ “...when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So you too, when you see *all these things*, recognize that he is near, right at the door” (*Matt. 24:32-33*).

NOTE: “*All these things*” start from the first specific thing that Jesus stated that Christians will see as a marker for the ‘end-times’, namely, “When you see the Abomination...” (verse 15) which causes “the Great tribulation” (verse 21). So from the time it becomes evident that they are in the time of the Great tribulation vigilant Christians will know that their “redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:28).

WHAT ABOUT THE ABSENCE OF THE WORD ‘CHURCH’ AFTER REVELATION 3:22?

This word also does not occur in 2 Timothy, Titus, 2 Peter, 1 and 2 John or Jude. However, the word “*saints*” occurs 12 times after Revelation 3:22. If, however, *Israel* is absent between Revelation 7:5 and 21:12, does this mean that the Revelation does not include events involving Israel?

BUT CHRISTIANS ARE “NOT APPOINTED TO WRATH” (1 Thess. 5:9)!

Unlike the Pre-Tribulation scheme the biblical scheme demonstrates that “the day of Wrath” follows on after “the Great Tribulation” (see STUDY 15) so that Christians will not be subject to God’s wrath as will be the case for the wicked. Christians will have divine protection through this latter period as did the ancient Israelites for the last of the plagues upon Egypt just prior to the exodus.

WHAT ABOUT GOD’S PROMISE OF: “I WILL **KEEP** YOU FROM THE HOUR OF TRIAL” (*Rev. 3:10*)?

Our concern here is to know what the term “keep (Gk. *tereo*) refers to. According to Thayers Gk-Eng lexicon when “keep [*tereo*] is used with “from” [*ek*], it means: “by guarding, to cause to escape in safety out of.” So this gives the thought of protection provided for someone so that they may be **preserved through** a difficult situation rather than having avoided it just as with the ancient Israelites in Egypt. The other use of this combination of *tereo ek* is in John 17:15 where Jesus has just prayed that his disciples not be taken out of the world but rather that the father “keeps them from [*Gk. tereoes autous ek*] the evil one” or as the NRSV renders it “but I ask you to **protect** them from the evil one.” So it is evident that this text should not be used in an attempt to prove that Christians will avoid “the Great Tribulation” by being prematurely raptured out of it.

Jesus Returns Only Once

The pre-tribulational rapture teaching that Jesus returns twice, the first time to take Christians to heaven and a second time to bring the Armageddon destruction on the wicked, does not fit with the data contained in the Scriptures. For instance:

- ❖ “Christ...will appear (Gk *opsthesetai*) a **second time** for salvation, to those who eagerly await him”
(*Heb. 9:28*).

Jesus’ first appearance was in the 1st century. Hebrews 9:28 clearly shows that there is only a single return at a “*second time which is for salvation*” and not a return and then a later Armageddon return. Confirmation of this is gained by understanding the contexts in which the Greek words for Jesus’ return were used in the Scriptures.

GREEK WORD MEANINGS:

Parousia (noun) = a coming to be present
apokalypsis (noun) = a revealing
epiphania (noun) = an appearing, a manifestation;
phaneroo (verb) = to be manifested
erchomai (verb) = to come
elthon = having come].

Pre-tribulationism correctly teaches that the Greek words **epiphania** and **erchomai** are associated with and occur at the same time as the **apokalypsis**. However, Pre-tribulationism incorrectly proposes that Christ's **Parousia** occurs 7 years earlier than his **apokalypsis**, **epiphania** and **erchomai**. An examination of the usages of these words in the Scriptures shows that they all refer to a **single event**.

These Four Terms Describe the Same Event on the Day Jesus Returns

'PAROUSIA' OCCURS WHEN 'APOKALIPSIS' OCCURS

- ❖ "...the flood...so **the advent** (*parousia*) of the Son of Man will be" (*Matt. 24:39*).
 - ❖ "...the flood...on **that day** when the Son of Man is **revealed** (*apokaliptetai*)" (*Luke 17:27, 30*).
- So Jesus uses the flood as a single event illustration of his return.*

'PAROUSIA' OCCURS WHEN 'EPIPHANIA' OCCURS

- ❖ "...by the **appearing** (*epiphania*) of his **coming** (*parousia*)..." (*2 Thess. 2:8*).
- ❖ "...when he is **made visible** (*phanerothe*)...at his **coming** (*parousia*)" (*1 John 2:28*).

'PAROUSIA' OCCURS WHEN 'ERCHOMAI' OCCURS

- ❖ "For just **as the lightning** comes from the east and flashes to the west, so will the coming (*parousia*) of the Son of Man be" (*Matt. 24:27*).
- ❖ "...the flood...so **the advent** (*parousia*) of the Son of Man will be" (*Matt. 24:39*).
- ❖ "...you do not know on **what day** you lord is **coming** (*erchetai*)" (*Matt. 24:42*).

These comparisons show that *the parousia* cannot be separated in time from the other terms. Although not synonyms they are related terms and refer to only one return of Jesus in contrast with the pre-tribulation rapture scenario.

ADDITIONAL COMPARISONS OF THESE TERMS

- ❖ "...to repay with affliction those who afflict you, to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us *when* the Lord Jesus will be **revealed** (*apokalipsei*) from heaven with His mighty angels ... *when He comes* (*elthe = erchomai*) to be glorified in His saints on **that day**" (*2 Thess. 1:7-10*).
 - ❖ "He is **coming** (*erchetai*) with the clouds and **every eye will see Him**" (*Rev. 1:7*).
- Please refer back to 1 John 2:28: "when he is made visible (phanerothe)." So the parousia cannot be invisible or secret because it is the same event as the epiphania which is visible, and the apokalypsis which means a revealing. Additionally Christ's parousia will be seen just as lightning is seen.*

Jesus Returns Only after the Great Tribulation

- ❖ "For then there will be **Great Tribulation** ... But immediately **after the tribulation** of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky ... And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky...and they will **see the Son of Man coming** on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory" (*Matt. 24:21, 29, 30*).

REWARDS ARE GIVEN ONLY WHEN JESUS APPEARS

- ❖ "...as we await *the blessed hope*, the appearance (*epiphaneian*) of the glory of the great God and of our saviour Jesus Christ" (**Titus 2:13** NAB). *So the blessed hope is not an earlier secret "parousia."*
- ❖ "Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his *epiphaneian* and his *kingdom* ... there is laid up for me the *crown of righteousness*, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will *award me* on that day...also to all who have loved his *epiphaneian*" (*2 Tim. 4:1, 8*).

- ❖ "...so that the proof of your faith...may be found to result in *praise and glory* and honor at the apokalipsei of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:7).
- ❖ "And when the Chief Shepherd appears (*phanerotheros*), you will receive the *unfading crown* of glory" (1 Peter 5:4).
- ❖ "...when He appears (*phanerothe*), we will *be like Him*, because we shall see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2).

Therefore, the rewards to Christians are not given at a so called earlier secret "*parousia*," but when the kingdom comes at Jesus' appearing and revelation. Also note that rewards are to be given at resurrection time "...you will be *repaid* at **the resurrection** of the righteous" (Luke 14:14).

All Christians Must Be Resolute until Christ Returns

"The day" is "the day of Christ" concerning his return. This is when Christians gain their final salvation: "for now *our salvation is nearer...and the day is near*" (Rom. 13:11, 12). "...hold fast what you have *until I come*" (Rev. 2:25). Indeed, "...each man's *work will become evident*; for **the day** will show it up because it is to be revealed with fire" (1 Cor. 3:13), as Paul further said:

- ❖ "He who began a good work in you *will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus*...in order to be sincere and *blameless until the day of Christ*" (Phil. 1:6, 10).

As noted in STUDY 16 "the day of the Lord" occurs after the Great Tribulation. So the above encouragements would be meaningless if the body of Christ were not here on earth to the end of the Great Tribulation to greet Jesus when he returns.

The Failure of Mid-Tribulation Rapture Futurism

This scheme, as the name implies, simply moves the rapture along to the middle of the 70th 'seven' of Daniel's 70 'sevens.' So, as with pre-tribulationism, it fails on all the above counts except in its recognition that the 'the Great Tribulation' will last for approximately 3½ years and that there is no 7 year tribulation.

SUGGESTED READING

The Approaching Advent of Christ by Alexander Reese

www.biblicaltruthseekers.co.uk