The ‘Rapture’ – A Package Deal With a Major Problem

As I’ve mentioned in other places, there are five rapture positions. They depend on the belief that the 70th week (seven years) of Daniel’s seventy weeks of years prophecy (490 years) has been postponed. Those who hold to a pre-tribulation rapture position believe the rapture of the church will take place before the seven-year period. Mid-tribbers believe the rapture takes place at the mid-point of the seven years. Post-tribbers claim the rapture takes place at the end of the seven-year people. The “partial” or “conditional rapture” position is as follows:

> *This view teaches that only those who are spiritual, who are prepared for the Lord’s return, will escape the terrors of the tribulation by being taken in the rapture. Carnal Christians are raptured progressively during the tribulation as they become righteous and the tribulation period is a time for disciplining believers toward holy living. …*
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> *The partial rapture theory originated with Robert Govett in 1835 in his book Entrance into the Kingdom: The Apocalypse Expounded by Scripture. Later proponents of this view include J.A. Seiss, G.H. Pember, G.H. Lang, Ray Brubaker and the cult of the Local Church Movement (Witness Lee).*

The newest entry is the Pre-Wrath Rapture position. This fifth rapture position teaches that the church is raptured just prior to God pouring out His wrath in judgment. It’s closest to the post-trib position since it takes place near the end of the seven-year period (Daniel’s postponed 70th week). When Jesus described the coming judgment on Jerusalem in the Olivet Discourse, that took place in the lead up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, those living in Jerusalem

could avoid His wrath by fleeing to the mountains outside of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:16). As we'll see, the pre-wrath position shares the same problems inherent in the other rapture positions.

Marvin Rosenthal formally named and publicized the pre-wrath Bible prophecy position in 1990 with the publication of his book *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, published by Thomas Nelson. He was a committed dispensationalist for many years. He rejected the position when after his own personal study he could not find support for the pre-trib rapture view. Rosenthal turned to John Walvoord to find *biblical* support for the position. Walvoord's *The Rapture Question* includes a list of fifty arguments in support of a pre-trib belief. Rosenthal was shocked when after reading the list that there was no biblical text that explicitly supported the doctrine. Rosenthal could come to only one conclusion:

> *Not once, among fifty arguments, does this godly Christian leader cite one biblical text that explicitly teaches pretribulation rapturism—not once. This was not an oversight. The reason for the omission of any pretribulation Rapture texts is clear. There are none. Walvoord's own comment helps substantiate that fact. He wrote, "It is therefore not too much to say that the Rapture question is determined more by ecclesiology [the doctrine of the Church] than eschatology [the doctrine of the last things]." In other words, he is saying that verses which deal with the church must be used to prove an issue that relates to the prophecy. There simply is no explicit exegetical evidence for pretribulation rapturism.*[1]

As Rosenthal came to find out, there is not one explicit verse to support a position that millions of Bible-believing Christians hold with unbending devotion. He was right. None of the major rapture positions can point to a verse that supports their position, something that pre- and post-tribbers admit.

In fact, none of the five rapture positions have any biblical support because they fail to account for the timing of prophetic events as they relate to Daniel's 70 weeks of years.

The Pre-wrath position makes the same mistake as the dispensationalists by separating the 70th week of Daniel's prophecy in Daniel 9:24–27 from the first 69 weeks when nothing is said about such a separation, gap, or parenthesis in the passage. The "rapture" is a package deal. It must include a discussion of how the 70th week of Daniel's 70 weeks of years prophecy has been postponed for nearly 2000 years. Those who appeal to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-52 to support the "rapture of the church" claim must explain why there is no mention of Daniel's prophecy anywhere in 1 Thessalonians or 1 Corinthians. There is no mention of an antichrist, making a covenant with Israel, breaking the covenant, rebuilding the temple (again), Israel returning to their land (again), or anything related to how the five rapture positions interpret Daniel 9:24-27.

Notice the extended gap between the 69th and 70th week.

Daniel is told that "70 weeks are decreed" (Daniel 9:24). This is a mistranslation. "The student of the Hebrew text will note that the masculine plural [70 weeks] is here construed with a verb in the singular (*is decreed*). The seventy *heptades* are conceived as a unit, a round number, and are most naturally understood as so many sevens of years."[2] There are 7 weeks, 62 weeks, and 1 week. These 70 weeks are said to be 70 weeks of years, thus, 490 years. There is no gap between the 7 and 62 weeks (483 weeks of years), so why is there a gap between the 69th (7 +62) and the 70th week?

Earlier in Daniel 9, we learn that Daniel is reading Jeremiah's prophecy: "[I]n the first year of the reign of [Darius the son of Ahasuerus], I, Daniel, observed in the

books the number of the years which was *revealed as* the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, *namely,* seventy years" (9:2).

The 70 years of captivity is the key that unlocks the 70 weeks of years. Daniel was referring to what we know today as Jeremiah 29:10: "For thus says the Lord, 'When **seventy years have been completed for Babylon**, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.'"

The 70 years of captivity lasted 70 years! There were no gaps, postponements, or an insertion of ongoing years as part of some change in God's redemptive plan. What if God had postponed the 70th year of release from captivity by nearly 2000 years but didn't count the 2000 years in the overall calculation? Only the 69 years and the final year would be counted. The additional years between the 69th and 70th year would not be counted. The 70th year was continually pushed into the future and the Jews would still be in captivity waiting for the 70th and final year, but God would only count 70 years. It makes no sense.

But this is exactly what dispensationalists and "pre-wrathers" claim is happening in Daniel 9:24–27. They only differ on when the "rapture" takes place. Pre-tribbers place the rapture before (pre) the tribulation period of seven years (Daniel's 70th week of years), while pre-wrath advocates place the rapture just prior to God pouring out His wrath during the seven-year (Daniel's 70th week of years) period. Both positions claim that the 70th year of Daniel's 70 weeks of years (490 years total) has been postponed contrary to any explicit statement in Daniel 9:24–27 of that fact. "Exactly 70 weeks in all are to elapse; and how can anyone imagine that there is an interval between the 69 and the 1, when these together make up the 70?"[3]

The following is from the book *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* on why a gap between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel's 70-week prophecy is "contrary to a vision of chronological sequence":

> *The vision of Daniel's seventy weeks … refers to a period of seventy sabbaticals or periods of seven years required to bring in the ultimate jubilee: release from sin, the establishment of everlasting righteousness, and consecration of the temple…. In the climactic seventieth week, Israel's King arrives and dies vicariously for his people. Strangely, the desecration of the temple similar to Antiochus Epiphanes in the Greek empire is perpetrated by the Jewish people themselves, resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem. These events are fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He is the coming King. His crucifixion is the sacrifice to end all sacrifices and the basis of the new covenant with the many. His death is "not for himself," but rather vicarious. The rejection of Jesus the Messiah and the desecration of him as the true Temple by his trial by the high priest result in judgment upon the Herodian temple, carried out eventually in A.D. 70.* ***The notion of a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week is contrary to a vision of chronological sequence. The prophecy is remarkable for its precision as it fits the event concerning Jesus of Nazareth.***[4]

Pre-wrath advocates follow the same type of postponement logic as the pre-tribulationalists. Their main disagreement with dispensationalism is when the "rapture of the church" takes place. The notion of a "rapture" is based on the unproven assumption that the 70th week has been pushed off into the distant future by a gap of nearly 2000 years (so far). Until the "gap" between the 69th and 70th weeks is proven from the text, there is no basis for a "rapture," either pre, mid, or post-tribulational, partial, or pre-wrath. Until the "gap" idea is proven, the pre-wrath position has the same inherent

problems as dispensationalism.

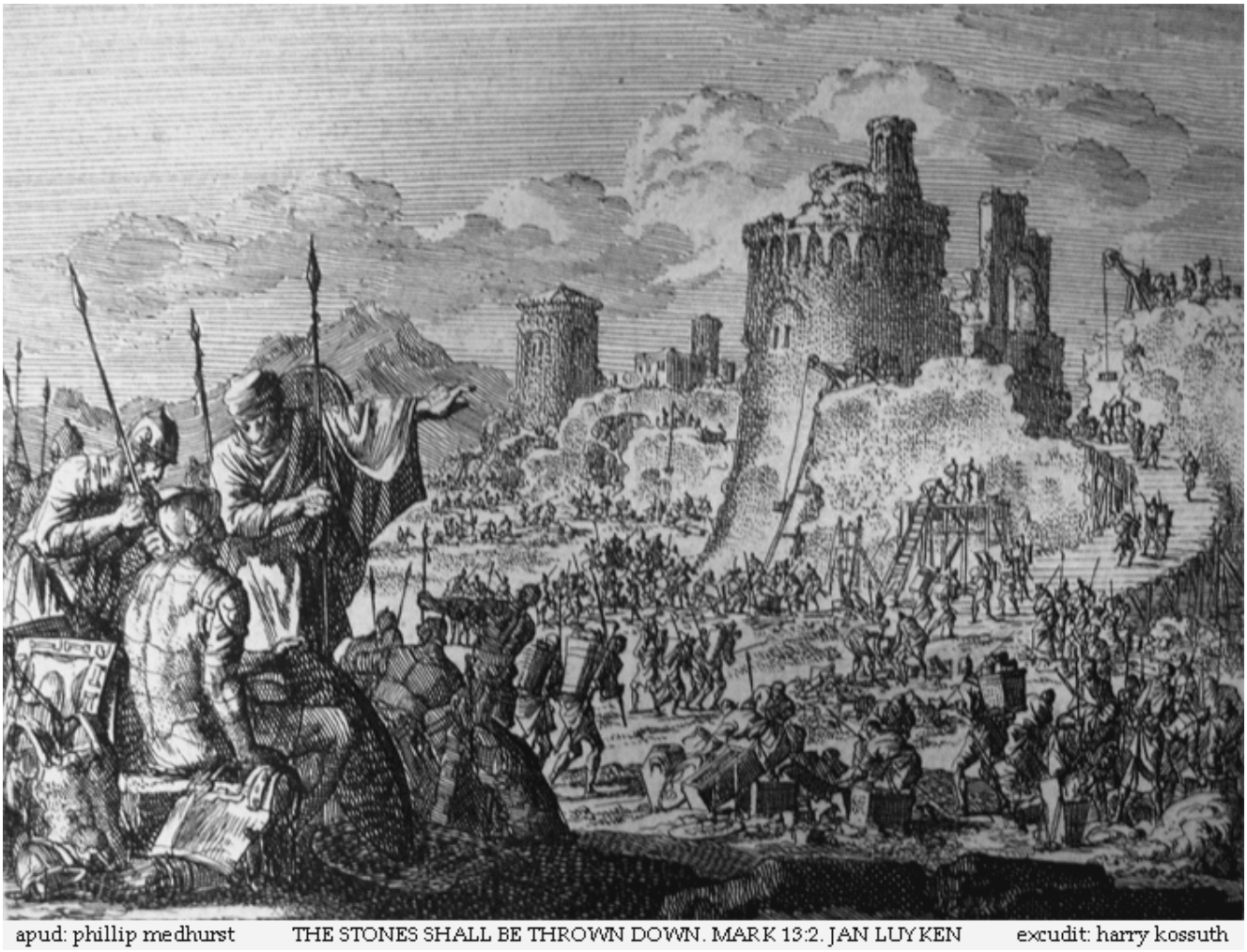
It's possible that we've missed the meaning of the following passage:

> *Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven (Matt. 18:21-22).*



Is Jesus referencing Daniel 9:24-27. Time had run out for Israel. The end of the Old Covenant was on the horizon. God's promises to Israel had been fulfilled. The separation of the wheat and tares was about to commence. The 70th week (the fullness of the 70 weeks of years: 490 years) was about to be fulfilled When Jesus prophesied that, "your house is being left to you desolate" (Matt. 23:38). The house was the temple

that would be destroyed within a generation (Matt. 24:34) as a symbol of that end.



All the rapture positions dismiss the New Testament's emphasis on the inauguration of the New Covenant and the Jerusalem above (Gal. 4:21-31). The writer to the Hebrews destroys the myth of a renewed covenant with earthly Jerusalem based on the rudiments of the Old Covenant: "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel" (12:22-24).

1. Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church: A*

New Understanding of the Rapture, the Tribulation, and the Second Coming (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 280. [↩]

2. Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalyptics: A Study of the Most Notable Revelations of God and of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, [1898] 1988), 201. [↩]
3. E. W. Hengstenberg, *The Christology of the Old Testament, and a Commentary on the Predictions of the Messiah by the Prophets*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C.: William M. Morrison, 1839), 3:143. [↩]
4. Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL Crossway, 2012), 563–564. Emphasis added. [↩]