

Reasons To Repudiate Rosenthal's Rapture Ramblings:

A Critique of *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*

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In May of 1989, at the conclusion of a fall away from pre-Tribulation Rapturism which began in 1986, Marvin Rosenthal, former head of the Friends of Israel ministry, was removed from his post because of his adoption of a novel Rapture viewpoint which, in his book which appeared in 1990, is termed “The Pre-Wrath Rapture.” In just over three hundred pages, Rosenthal sets forth and argues for his prophetic system, to conclude that “[p]retribulation rapturism provides a false hope” (pg. 296), while “the basic tenets found within [his] pages will not be successfully assaulted... Within two years many men will be teaching the prewrath Rapture. Within five years it will be a recognized position. And, if God pleases, within fifteen years it will become a major position of the believing church— if God gives that many years” (pg. 293). Upon examination of the *zeitgeist* of Rapture positions among premillennialists eleven years later, Rosenthal’s viewpoint has not and does not appear to be on its way toward displacing the dominant, and Scriptural, pretribulational viewpoint, despite the exploding cancer of apostasy within evangelicalism. Among the Lord’s fundamental, independent Baptist churches, support for pretribulational truth remains yet more firmly established. However, some of God’s sheep and churches have turned aside to follow Rosenthal’s new doctrine, and others among them are unable to Scripturally refute his assertions. Often this comes from a failure of God’s leaders to effectively inculcate true prophetic teachings into their people— sometimes because of weak personal knowledge of Biblical eschatology— alongside a lack of consistent personal, diligent, and Spirit-illuminated Bible study on all hands, which leaves those disobedient to God’s commands in this area unable to rightly divide the Word of truth and hold fast to sound doctrine.

We currently live in an interlude between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks of the prophecy of Daniel chapter nine. God has declared in the prophetic sections of His Book that the imminent Rapture of the saints will immediately proceed the

commencement of the seventieth week of Daniel, commonly and correctly¹ called the Tribulation, which will be a seven year period of time described in chronological order (with some interludes) in the book of the Revelation, chapters 4-19. In the middle of this period the Antichrist, who was revealed early in the first half of the 70th week, will break his covenant with the nation of Israel, and set himself up as God in the restored Jewish temple. The Tribulation will end with the destruction of Israel's enemies upon her repentance and the return of Messiah Jesus to deliver His people and establish His millennial rule. Furthermore, the time period described as the day of the Lord extends from the Rapture to the creation of the new heavens and earth at the end of the Millennium (2 Pe 3:7-13, Rev 21:1). The judgments inflicted upon the earth during this time of God's vengeance are described as seven seals, the last of which includes seven trumpet judgments, while the last trumpet includes the seven vial judgments. Both Rosenthal and the general body of pre-Tribulational believers agree with this telescoping interpretation of the seals, trumpets, and vials, but Rosenthal's view of these events in relation to the wrath of God is strikingly different, as is his interpretation of the Biblical terminology. He labels² the first three and a half years of the seventieth week "the beginning of sorrows." In this period, only the first four seals are opened by the Lamb. When the abomination of desolation is set up, the "Great Tribulation" begins. This time period covers the fifth and sixth seals, but still does not involve God's wrath. The Day of the Lord is said to follow, with the opening of the seventh seal. Immediately prior to this the "Church" (Rosenthal believes in a universal, invisible church; the Bible teaches only local assemblies of baptized believers) is Raptured. The wrath of God³ is then poured out for the remaining months of the seventieth week of Daniel with the trumpet judgments, while the bowl judgments are placed in a thirty day addendum which follows. At this

¹ See pgs. 15-16 in *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come!* Renald Showers.

² See his chart on p. 211, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*.

³ See his chart on p. 276, *ibid*.

point, the wrath of God ends, and after forty-five days when the Temple is cleansed, the Millennial kingdom is ushered in. A comprehensive refutation of Rosenthal's theory would require a similarly lengthy volume;⁴ all that will be attempted here is analysis of some of the pillars of the argumentation for his new doctrine, accompanied by a demonstration of exegetical problems.

For Rosenthal to maintain his theory, it is essential that his sequence of "birth pangs" for the first half of the 70th week, followed by the Great Tribulation, followed by the Day of the Lord, is maintained. He correctly believes that the Day of the Lord, as a time of God's judgment, commences after the age of grace saints are removed. If, as pre-Tribulationists maintain, the day of the Lord commences at the beginning of the seventieth week, the entirety of which represents God's wrath, and represents the time from that hour until the creation of new heavens and earth after the Millennium, Rosenthal's pre-wrath view is untenable.⁵ If, as Rosenthal insists, unquestionable signs must appear before the Day of the Lord can begin, immanency and pre-Tribulationism fall together.

Revelation 5:9, along with 6:1, 3, etc. state that the Lamb opens all seven of the seals to inaugurate their ensuing actions. While Rosenthal admits that wrath is associated with the seventh seal, since it contains within it the seven trumpets and vials, he denies that God's anger is involved with the other six seals to assert that man's wrath only is in view. To hold to this, the fact that the Lamb Himself presides over and initiates the actions in the first six seals in the same way He does the seventh must be ignored. Furthermore, the actions associated with first seals indicate God's judgment. God's sovereign determination to "raise up" the man of sin is predicted in Zech 11:15-17: "the

⁴ Showers, who is still with the Friends of Israel ministry, in his comprehensive study of the Rapture, mentioned in footnote #1, exegetically demolishes the pre-wrath theory. His book was written, at least in part, in response to Rosenthal's book.

⁵ Please note that the pre-Tribulation position (along with mid-Tribulationism), as well as Rosenthal's view, maintains that the church-age saints are caught up before God's wrath is poured upon mankind. While Rosenthal may term his position "pre-wrath," and we may assent to use his terminology in the matter, technically the pre- and mid-Tribulation positions similarly are "pre-wrath."

one spoken of as the foolish and worthless shepherd is undoubtedly the personal Antichrist of Daniel 11:36-39; John 5:43; 2 Thess 2:1-12 and Revelation 13:11-18.”⁶ “Having rejected the Good Shepherd (and having persisted in this rejection for some two thousand years), the Jews will be easily deceived by the evil shepherd.”⁷ God uses wicked men as His instruments of judgment (2 Ch 36:16-17, Ez 5:12, Jer 32:28-32, 25:9, 27:6, cf. Dan 3-4). When the Lamb opens the second seal, wars follow; God often uses war as an instrument of His judgment as well (Jer 50:9, 13, 25, Is 13:1-5, 9:11-12, 10:5-6, etc.). Famine, as associated with the third seal, is also God’s punishment (Jer 21:5-7, 9, 42:17-18, 22, 44:8, 11-13, Ezek 5:11-17, 7:3, 8, 14-15). Furthermore, a voice “in the midst” of the four beasts sets the prices in the famine (6:6); the voice must come from either God (4:2ff.) or the Lamb (Rev 5:6); it certainly does not come from earth-dwelling men, Satan, or his Antichrist. The fourth seal, which brings the death of one-fourth of the world’s population, is similarly from the Lord, who has declared death His penalty for sin (Romans 6:23), and who only has ultimate power to kill and to make alive (cf. Ezek 5:17, 14:21).⁸ God’s wrath upon men is evident in the first four seals, despite Rosenthal’s claim to the contrary. The fifth and sixth seals, which he claims constitute the Great Tribulation, but not God’s wrath, also do not fit into his picture. Seal five involves a promise by God to avenge the blood of His martyrs, and seal six contains obvious displays of divine power and anger from cosmic disturbances to severe earthquakes which can only originate from the arm of the Almighty. To ignore these facts to declare that the six seals are the wrath of man, not God, is to pervert the clear teaching of Scripture. Furthermore, the fact that God’s wrath “is come” in Rev 6:17 is an aorist indicative indicates that past time is the strong basic predisposition,⁹ so that the fundamental tendency for interpretation is to assume that the wrath began at some time

⁶ pg. 329, *The Minor Prophets*, Charles L. Feinberg. See also *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come!* pgs. 107-8ff.

⁷ pg. 295, *Exploring the Minor Prophets*, John Phillips.

⁸ See pgs. 114-118 *Maranatha: Our Lord, Come!*

⁹ See *Syntax of New Testament Greek*, James A. Brooks & Carlton L. Winbery, pgs. 98-104.

before that point; that the aorist can occasionally have a futuristic sense does not justify the assumption that it does so here. Certainly one cannot soundly build a doctrine of future wrath at the time of the seventh seal based upon an aorist spoken by masses of unconverted people who do not know or want to know God's will and ways. The context of Revelation six clearly does not support the elimination of the first six seals from God's wrath.

Rosenthal argues for the impropriety of terming the 70th week of Daniel, as a whole, the Tribulation period; he asserts that it predisposes a pretribulation Rapture. However, the Hebrew and Greek words for "tribulation," which are associated with the Day of the Lord wrath (Dt 31:17, 21, Ps 66:11, Zeph 1:14-15, Rom 2:5, 8-9) are associated with birth pangs (2 Ki 19:3, Jer 6:24, Jn 16:21), the sword, famine, and pestilence (2 Chr 20:9, Job 15:20-23, Ac 7:11), the removal of peace and warring nations (2 Ch 15:5-6), and the persecution of saints before the abomination of desolation is set up in the middle of the seventieth week (Mt 24:9, Dan 9:27), so the events of Matthew 24:4-9 and Revelation 6:1-8 are properly termed the "Tribulation" and considered as part of the Day of the Lord. However, the "Great Tribulation" is properly only the second half of Daniel's 70th week. Just as the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments grow progressively more severe, so the adjective "Great" is applied by the Lord to the latter section of the Tribulation which follows the Antichrist's violation of his covenant with Israel. In a similar fashion, the Day of the Lord begins with the Rapture at the commencement of the Tribulation and is not preceded by signs, but the "great and terrible day of the Lord" begins at the same time as the Great Tribulation, and is preceded by clear signs. Zechariah 14 clearly teaches that the general Day of the Lord encompasses the Millennial reign of Christ; the "day of the LORD" mentioned in verse 1 is the "in that day" of v. 4, 6, 8, 13, 20, 21. These two Hebrew expressions are clearly used synonymously in Isaiah

2:11-12; Isaiah uses them in a fashion identical to Zechariah throughout his book.¹⁰ Rosenthal takes passages such as Malachi 4:5-6 and Joel 2:31, which assert that notable events must happen before the “great and terrible day of the LORD,” equates this period with the general day of the Lord without any positive Scriptural warrant and despite strong exegetical evidence from passages such as Zechariah fourteen, and concludes that items such as the return of Elijah and divers cosmic disturbances must proceed the general day of the Lord, which Biblically comes “as a thief in the night” without signs, and is immediately proceeded by the Rapture of the saints (1 Thess 4:13-5:11). Interestingly enough, in the process of his argument for his definition of the day of the Lord (pg. 123), he quotes Zechariah 14:1-4 and assents to the association between the phrases “the day of the LORD” and “that day” in the passage. He neglects, however, to trace the further elaboration of the time period signified by “that day” past the first four verses. Indeed, he never directly argues against, nor even mentions the possibility of a distinction between the general and “great and terrible” day of the Lord; since this Scriptural difference topples his novel Rapture view, his silence apparently signifies either a failure to do sufficient study, which resulted in a lack of awareness of the distinction, or a tacit admission of exegetical shortcoming.

Rosenthal also argues that the Great Tribulation does not extend throughout the second half of the seventieth week, but is shortened, so that the wrath of God, which is alleged to begin after this period and to continue until the end of the seventieth week, may commence. However, there is clear Biblical evidence that the Great Tribulation covers the entire second half of Daniel’s 70th week. First of all, Matthew 24:21 states that the Great Tribulation will involve trouble such as never was to that time, nor “ever shall be.” Therefore, if a day of the Lord were to follow, where God’s, rather than man’s

¹⁰ See “A Critique of the Pre-Wrath Rapture Theory,” by Thomas Strouse, the section entitled “Fallacy #1: The Day of the Lord is not the same as the Period of the Tribulation and Millennium,” at <http://wayoflife.org/~dcloud/fbns/critiqueprewrath.htm>.

wrath, is poured out, it could not really be that bad; the Great Tribulation is declared to be the very worst trouble in all of history. The anger of the Omnipotent is then made less severe than that of His creatures. Furthermore, the Great Tribulation is a period of persecution for Israel, and her persecution will last the entire second half of the 70th week (Rev 12:6, 14, 13:5, 7). Finally, Rosenthal's assertion that the expression "except those days should be shortened" in Matthew 24:21 deals with the reduction of the Great Tribulation beyond the three and a half years decreed would be, were there no Scriptural evidence to the contrary, at best an assumption which would not form a proper foundation for the formulation of sound doctrine; since it has already been demonstrated that the Day of the Lord wrath begin with the commencement of the Tribulation period, his view must be rejected. The expression properly refers to God's decree, which has already been made (the verb tenses of the expressions in the parallel passage, Mark 13:20, are aorist indicative, which strongly suggests past time), to give man only a short three and a half years of Great Tribulation, rather than any longer period, so that all men, including the elect, do not perish in the horrific judgments of that period.

Rosenthal asserts further (p. 207ff) that 2 Thessalonians chapter two refutes a pre-tribulation Rapture. However, the passage does nothing of the kind. Some have argued that the declaration in 2:3 that the day of Christ is not "at hand" means that certain signs need to occur before its commencement. However, the word that there appears is *ενεστηκεν*, which is the perfect active indicative third singular of *ενιστεμι*, a compound verb from the preposition "in" and the verb "to stand." Its primary meaning is "to place in or among, to put in," and it also signifies "present." It appears seven times in the New Testament, and is translated "things present" in Rom 8:38, (a perfect active participle), as in 1 Cor 3:22 and 1 Cor 7:26, "the present,"— here it refers to distress the church at Corinth was currently undergoing— Gal 1:4, "this present," and Heb 9:9, "then present." Only in 2 Tim 3:1 is it translated "shall come," but there, unlike in all its other appearances, the word is a future deponent middle indicative verb, instead of a perfect

tense form. This reference in 2 Thessalonians 2 is the only place it is translated “at hand,” and here it is a perfect active indicative verb. The use of the perfect, which fundamentally signifies “a present state which has resulted from a past action,” where “the present state is a continuing state; the past action a completed action,”¹¹ demonstrates that the Thessalonians did not fear that the day of Christ was shortly to come, but that they had missed the Rapture (a past completed action) and were currently present within the day of the Lord (a continuing state). This would naturally trouble the church, for they had been assured that the brethren would escape the earthly day of the Lord (1 Thess 4:13-5:9). The Holy Spirit is the restrainer spoken of in the chapter, and He is removed upon the Rapture of His saints. 2 Thessalonians 2:6 states that the church knew “what withholdeth,” (το κατεχων); the same entity referred to as “he who now letteth (hindereth)” in verse seven (ο κατεχων). The Greek word “spirit” (πνευμα) is neuter in gender, but the Holy Spirit is sometimes given the masculine pronoun because of His personality, against the normal rules of grammar (cf. John 14:17)— the combination of neuter and masculine in reference to the same Being in the text is a compelling argument that the Holy Spirit is the Restrainer mentioned, who enables His people in this age to overcome the spirit of antichrist (1 John 4:3-4). Correct exegesis of second Thessalonians two strongly supports, rather than detracts from, a pretribulational Rapture.

Many other errors in Rosenthal’s book could be elaborated, from his association of the seventh trumpet with the “last trump” of first Corinthians, to his rejection of immanency, to his determination that the new heavens and new earth appear before the Millennium, but this work must be left to others.¹² These positions share the unscriptural nature of his views already demonstrated. God’s people should heartily reject the pre-wrath Rapture for the Biblical truth of the pre-Tribulational, pre-Millennial return of Christ.

¹¹ *Syntax of New Testament Greek*, Brooks & Winbery, pg. 104

¹² Showers’ book on the Rapture (Bibliography #4) is especially good against the pre-wrath heresy.

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