

Overview of Pretribulationism

Description of Pretribulationism

Pretribulationism teaches that the rapture of the entire church (both the dead and living saints) will occur before the any part of the seven-year tribulation period, the seventieth week of Daniel 9:27.

History of Pretribulationism

Pretribulationism came with the rise of premillennialism. As more and more interest was given to premillennialism, the specifics of the system became more developed.

The earliest champion of pretribulationism was John Nelson Darby, a leader in the Brethren Movement in the middle 1800's. Darby was a gifted speaker and organizer and his travels brought many influential pastors and teachers to his opinions. These men included D. L. Moody and James Brooks, who would train C. I. Scofield.

The growing interest in eschatology in the nineteenth century led to many prophecy conferences. This provided a platform for the pretribulationist position to be expounded.

In addition, C. I. Scofield published the very popular Scofield Reference Bible in 1909 which included the pretribulationist perspective. In addition, Bible colleges such as Moody Bible Institute and the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (Biola), and seminaries such as Dallas Theological Seminary were founded, expanding this view further.

Today, the premillennial, pretribulationist view of eschatology is the most commonly held position among conservative churches in America. In addition, most missionaries and mission organizations are sympathetic to this view and therefore it is a widely held view among churches around the world.

Arguments for Pretribulationism

- The church will be "kept from" (literally "out from", not "through" or "in") the hour of trial (Revelation 3:10). Because the tribulation will be worldwide, the church must be removed in order to be preserved from this trial.
- The church is saved "from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:10), and the tribulation is the "great day of His wrath" (Revelation 6:17). The "wrath to come" is thus the tribulation.
- Also, "God has not destined us for wrath", according to 1 Thessalonians 5:9. Paul writes this as he discusses the Day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:2), indicating believers will be spared from the wrath of the Day of the Lord.
- There is not one reference to the church in Revelation 4-18 dealing with the tribulation period. This stands in strong contrast to the first three chapters of the book, which speak continually to the church (19 references).

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- There is no prophetic event yet to be fulfilled before the rapture. If the rapture is to occur at the end of the tribulation, then numerous events must transpire before the return of Christ (the Jewish temple built, the judgments of Revelation 6-18, the gospel preached to all nations, etc).
- The New Testament anticipates Christ's imminent return (Philippians 3:20; 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 4:15-18; Titus 2:13; James 5:7; 2 Corinthians 5:2-3; Acts 1:6-10). With pretribulationism, the doctrine of imminency remains intact.
- If the church is to go through the tribulation, there is no comforting hope for the church. Yet we are to comfort one another with the words about the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:18).
- If the Thessalonians were to go through the tribulation, why should they be upset at thinking they were in the Day of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2) when that would mean the rapture would be soon?
- The indwelling, restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit will be removed from the earth before the tribulation (2 Thessalonians 2:7-8). Since the Holy Spirit indwells the church, the body of Christ, the removal of the Spirit's restraining work suggests the removal of the church.
- The tribulation period focuses on Israel and on earth as preparation for the time of restoration (Deuteronomy 4:29-30; Jeremiah 30:4-11; Daniel 9:24-27; 12:1-2; Matthew 24:15-20; Revelation 7, 12-16). The Bible nowhere includes the church with the tribulation. The 70th week of Daniel remains united in God's plan for Israel under pretribulationism
- There is a necessity of an interval between the rapture and the millennium to gain converts to populate the earth during the millennium. If the rapture occurs at the second coming then all believers will have heavenly bodies. How will there then be death and rebellion at the end of the tribulation and procreation during the 1,000 years? Pretribulationists believe the saints who are converted in the tribulation will go into the millennium and will procreate. It is their offspring who will rebel.