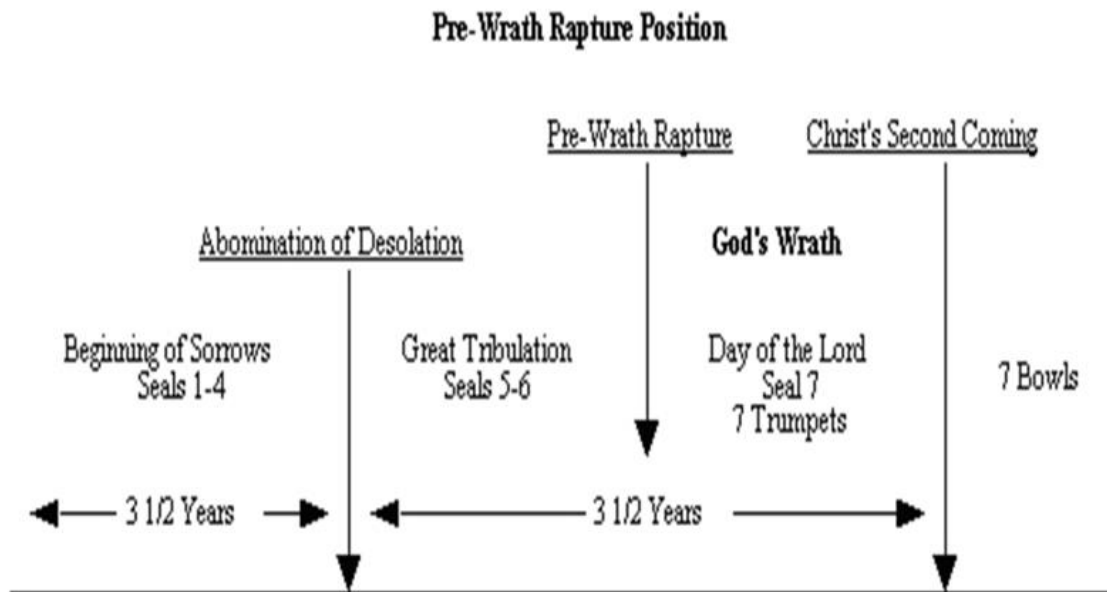


Problems with the Prewrath Rapture Position

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The prewrath theory suggests that there are actually three divisions to the seven-year Tribulation Period instead of just two. The church will pass through the first two divisions of the Tribulation Period and then be raptured before the third division of the Tribulation Period begins which is called the Day of the Lord. The church will be raptured about three fourths of the way through the Tribulation Period when God's wrath begins to be meted out on the earth.



This theory, which was developed by Van Kampen, teaches that the first five seals are not the expression of God's wrath – only man's wrath or Satan's wrath. For this reason, the Church will remain on earth until the wrath of man is finished but be raptured before God's wrath begins three fourths of the way through the Tribulation Period following the time of Antichrist's wrath. Therefore, it is called a prewrath Rapture of the Church. The Church will be raptured three quarters of the way through Daniel's 70th week (Dan. 9:24) prior to the commencement of God's wrath. Van Kampen limits the wrath of God to the final year and three-quarters of the seven-year period and concludes that the Rapture occurs right before the "wrath of God" time period. So, Van Kampen distinguishes the Rapture and the Second Coming with a gap of one and three-quarter years between them.

One thing is certain, the whole premise of this argument is unbiblical, unwarranted, and in error. This is because it argues that the first six seals do not represent God's wrath being meted out on the world. But the Scriptures clearly confirm that the Lamb has taken the scroll, or title deed to planet earth (Rev. 5:5, 9), and is unleashing the judgments which will lead to His Second Coming and the restored theocracy. To state it simply, the seals are opened by the Lamb and do represent His wrath, as He begins to take back the earth for God. The foundation of this prewrath theory is built on sinking sand. It is weighed and found wanting. All the Seal Judgments represent the Lamb's wrath – not Satan's or man's wrath.

Below is a summary of the prewrath position.

- ❖ This theory chops the single period of seven years into compartmental segments that contain either the wrath of man and Satan or the wrath of God. The Seal Judgments are the wrath of Satan and the Antichrist, or man, and not the judgment or wrath of God.
- ❖ Division one (the first four seals) is the beginning of sorrows. This time division encompasses the first three and one-half years of the Tribulation Period which are identified as the beginning of birth pangs in Matthew 24:4-8. The first four seals do not contain God's wrath. They are an expression of Satan's and man's wrath – not God's wrath.
- ❖ Division two (the fifth seal) is the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:21). It actually begins in the middle of the seven years, but only lasts a short time (Matt. 24:22), perhaps a year and a half, instead of three and one-half years. The fifth seal does not contain God's wrath. It is only an expression of Satan's and man's wrath – not God's wrath. At the end of this shortened period of time, Christ will come and rapture His people.
- ❖ Division three (sixth and seventh seals) is the Day of the Lord. The sixth seal is a *precursor sign* that the Day of the Lord is going to begin with the seventh seal actually beginning the Day of the Lord, somewhere between the middle and end of the Tribulation Period. Seal five is an expression of Satan's and man's wrath while seal six is a *transitional seal* that begins to express God's wrath to the world and leads into the Day of the Lord in the seventh seal.

- ❖ The church is pictured in Heaven following its prewrath Rapture (Revelation 7:9-17). The Church remains on earth during the first two divisions of Daniel's 70th week which encompass the first six seals. This includes the first three and one half years (the beginning of sorrows) and the Great Tribulation Period (part of the second three and one half years), while Satan's (not God's wrath) is being poured out in the world, through catastrophic occurrences and the persecution that God's saints will experience from the Antichrist.
- ❖ God's wrath will not begin until the Day of the Lord begins (the third division of Daniel's 70th week) which is three quarters of the way through the Tribulation Period. The Church is raptured before the seventh seal begins (The Day of the Lord). It is seen in Heaven before the Day of the Lord begins, which is the expression of God's wrath on earth, unfolded in the seventh seal. Hence, the church will experience a prewrath rapture three fourths of the way through Daniel's 70th week and escape God's wrath.
- ❖ In summary, the Seal Judgments are the wrath of Satan and the Antichrist, or man, and not the judgment or wrath of God. It is the prewrath position that Matthew 24:22, a reference to the days of the Great Tribulation Period being shortened, is a reference to the "Church" being raptured, which results in the removal of believers from the earth and ending their persecution from the Antichrist and Satan.

The Errors Refuted:

- Jesus taught there were only two divisions to the Tribulation Period – not three (Matt. 24:1-25). There would be a lesser and greater time of tribulation that is divided into two segments.

The Great Tribulation, which coincides with our Lord's statements in Matthew 24:15-22, and which involves the persecution by the Antichrist, is said to be 1,260 days in length, or three and one half years (Rev. 12:6, 14; Dan. 7:25; 12:1, 7). This gives us the proper time designation of the Great Tribulation and encompasses the time when Israel is persecuted by the Antichrist during the second half of Daniel's 70th week. This time designation is also said to be 42 months or three and one-half years in length (Rev. 13:5). Therefore, the conclusion that the Great Tribulation is shorter than three one-half years is unfounded. The statement of God shortening

the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:22) does not mean that it will be less than three and one-half years, ushering in the final time segment of the Day of the Lord. It simply means that in God's decreed counsel it was ordained to be only three and one-half years or else all of mankind would be physically eliminated (Mark 13:20).

To state it succinctly, Jesus did not view the Great Tribulation as a short period of time that only occurs somewhere in the second half of Daniel's 70th week. It would encompass the entire second half of the Tribulation Period and the time when the Jews will be persecuted (Rev. 12:6, 14; 13:5-7; Dan. 7:25; 12:1). The Scriptures speak for themselves on these time designations. Jesus also taught that He would return in His Second Coming "after the tribulation of those days" (Matt. 24:29). Of course, He was looking back to what He previously said about the two, equally divided time periods of the seven-year Tribulation Period, which would encompass the entire framework of Daniel's 70th week (the Day of the Lord). Jesus never hinted that there would be only a small segment of the Tribulation Period, designated as the Day of the Lord, that would exclusively or solely include God's wrath. The wrath of God begins at the moment the Tribulation Period begins.

- The wrath of the Lamb is clearly expressed in the first six seals (Rev. 1:1, 3, 5, 7, 9). No honest student of Scripture can deny that the sovereign Lamb is directly responsible for opening the Seal Judgments.

The first five seals, which are linked to the beginning birth pangs in Matthew 24:4-14 (the first three and one-half years of Daniel's 70th week), are a clear expression of the Lamb's wrath. Scripture clearly reveals that it is the Lamb who opens the seals (Revelation 5:5; 6:1). These are not man's judgments; they are the expression of God's wrath and His judgments – the judgments of a true and righteous God (Rev. 16:7). The tribulation begins when Jesus opens the first seal, and from that point on, the wrath of God is meted out on a sinful world.

Rosenthal insists that the word "wrath" does not appear until the sixth seal (Rev. 6:16). Therefore, the first five seals cannot be an expression of God's wrath. This is an erroneous conclusion. The word wrath does not appear in Genesis chapter six, but no person would ever doubt that the Flood was an expression of God's wrath. The words Trinity, incarnation, and Rapture do not appear in the Bible, but they are teachings which are clearly represented in the various contexts of Scripture.

- The Scriptures indicate that the Day of the Lord (God's wrath) is greater in length than just one or two years within the second half of Daniel's 70th week (Isa. 30:23-25; 34:1-8; 35:1-10; Joel 2:28-32; 3:1-21; Zech. 14:1-21; Zeph. 3:8, 16-20).

The Old Testament does not limit the Day of the Lord to a small sector of time within the framework of Daniel's 70th week. For instance, the Day of the Lord (God's wrath) occurs throughout the entire Tribulation Period - not just a final quarter of the Tribulation Period. This can be easily seen in that the final bowl judgments are a continuation and final completion of God's wrath which had been displayed throughout the previous years of the Tribulation Period (Rev. 15:1). In fact, the wrath of God's judgment can be viewed as a telescope effect, one series of judgment flowing out of the other (Seals, Trumpet, Bowl Judgments).

The seven seals (Revelation 6:1-17, 8:1-5), seven trumpets (Revelation 8:6-13; 11:15-19), and seven bowls/vials (Revelation 16:1-21) are three series of End Time judgments from God. The judgments get progressively worse and more devastating as the End Times progress. The seven Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls are connected to one another like a telescope. The seventh seal introduces the seven trumpets (Revelation 8:1-6), and the seventh trumpet introduces the seven bowls (Revelation 11:15-19, 15:1-8). The last judgment in a given series flows into the next series of judgments. The entire seven-year Tribulation Period is seen as a continual flow of God's wrath.

Manfred Kober correctly states:

"Rosenthal limits the Day of the Lord to 21 months, one reason being that the prophets spoke of the Day of the Lord, using a definite article. In fact, not once in the 18 OT usages of the Day of the Lord is the definite article used in the Hebrew. A close study of the biblical usage of the Day of the Lord indicates that it includes a time of judgment (the Tribulation period) and a time of blessing, the Millennium (Zeph. 3:8-13; Hag. 2:6-23; Zech. 14:1-10). If it can be demonstrated that the Day of the Lord covers more than 42 months—and it can—the pre-wrath position falls."

The Day of the Lord includes such things as judgment upon the entire world (Rev. 3:10), including judgment upon the nation of Israel and the Gentile nations. This will occur throughout the seven-year Tribulation Period. It also includes the narrow aspect of the coming of Messiah to judge the earth and deliver and restore Israel

(Joel 2:31-32). Judgment is a major aspect of the Day of the Lord, but it also relates to the coming rule of the Messiah and His goal to rule the earth (Joel 3:14-15; Micah 4:6-7). The Day of the Lord is actually an extended period of time that begins after the Rapture of the Church and which eventually moves into the commencement of the Millennial Kingdom.

- The Day of the Lord relates to birth pangs of tribulation that will come upon the world (Matt. 24:4-8 with 1 Thess. 5:2-3; Isa. 13:6-9; Zeph. 1:14-18 where “travail” means birth pangs). This certainly places the first half of Daniel’s 70th week and the Great Tribulation within the scope of the Day of the Lord.

The concept of birth pangs has its Biblical roots in the period of time known as the Day of the Lord. This means the birth pangs (first half of Daniel’s 70th week) and the Great Tribulation (second half of Daniel’s 70th week) are not separate divisions of time that are unrelated to the Day of the Lord. Paul links the commencement of the Day of the Lord with birth pangs as Jesus taught in Matthew 24:8.

1 Thessalonian 5:2-3

“For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.”

The birth pangs were the beginning of the Tribulation Period and Paul uses this same descriptive terminology to be part of the Day of the Lord. Daniel’s 70th week and the Day of the Lord will begin sometime after the Rapture of the Church, when a false sense of security and peace is established throughout the world. In short, the Day of the Lord is not a separate time designation within the seven years. It embraces the entire seven years. The Old Testament repeatedly viewed the Day of the Lord as a unified period of God’s wrath and judgment. There is no linguistic basis to assert that the Day of the Lord refers to only one and half years at the end of the Tribulation Period.

Zephaniah 1:14-18 brings together a cluster of terms that characterize the future Day of the Lord. Verse 14 labels this time as “the great day of the Lord” and “the day of the Lord.” In verses 15-18 he describes this time with the following descriptions: “that day is a day of wrath,” “a day of trouble and distress,” “a day of wasteness and desolation,” “a day of darkness and gloominess,” “a day of clouds

and thick darkness,” “a day of the trumpet and alarm,” “I will bring distress upon men,” and “the day of the Lord’s wrath.” The context supports the notion that all these descriptions apply to the Day of the Lord. The Biblical usage of the Day of the Lord does not allow an interpreter to chop the Day of the Lord into compartmental segments as Van Kampen and Rosenthal insist. The text plainly says that the Day of the Lord is a time of both tribulation and God’s wrath. All of these descriptions in this passage provide a characterization of the Day of the Lord that applies to the entire seven-year period.

Since all six Seal Judgments begin the same way, with the breaking of the seal by the Lamb, one should not be at all surprised that Revelation 6:16-17 summarizes all six judgments as “the wrath of the Lamb,” and “the great day of his wrath.” This cannot be the wrath of man or Satan.

Revelation 6:17

“For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”

Revelation 6:17 links this expression of God’s wrath to the Old Testament terminology.

Robert Thomas correctly observes:

“It is difficult to capture the Greek wording in English without a periphrasis such as “the day, that great day.” “The great day” is a title borrowed from the OT (Joel 2:11, 31; Zeph. 1:14; Mal. 4:5) . . . The primary passages from which John draws his images in the description of the sixth seal prove the reference of this phrase to be to the Day of the Lord (Joel 2:11, 30-31; cf. Isa. 2:10-11, 19-21; 13:9-34; 13; 34:4, 8; Ezek. 32:7-8; Hos. 10:8)” (Thomas, Revelation, p. 458).

As previously confirmed, the Old Testament repeatedly views the Day of the Lord as a single period of God’s wrath and judgment.

With respect to Revelation 16:7, Rosenthal wants us to believe that God’s wrath is only about to begin and that it had not been experienced on earth in the previous Seal Judgments. This is a ruse and gives a false impression of what John is teaching.

Thomas once again states:

“The controlling verb in verse 17, “is come” (lthen), “is aorist indicative, referring to a previous arrival of the wrath, not something that is about to take place” (Robert L. Thomas, Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary, Moody, 1992, p. 457).

- The descriptive terms of sorrow and tribulation also encompasses God’s wrath in the period known as the Day of the Lord (seven years). God’s wrath is not limited to a year and a half during the second half of Daniel’s 70th week.

The Day of the Lord and God’s wrath, according to Old Testament apocalyptic imagery, is prophetically associated with birth pangs (Isa. 13:8-9; 26:16-18). This is the same analogy that Jesus uses when speaking about the future Tribulation Period (“the beginning of sorrows” – Matt. 24:8). He also uses the term “tribulation” during the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:21, 29) which parallels with the Old Testament imagery of the distress and trouble of the Day of the Lord (Jer. 30:7; Zeph. 1:14-17). As Jesus spoke of both time designations of the Tribulation Period, He was identifying the entire Tribulation Period as a fulfillment of the Day of the Lord. This means that the entire scope of tribulation (the seven years) is part of Daniel’s 70th week and is not limited to only a small segment of time during the second half of the Tribulation Period.

The Bible argues for a unifying theme of God’s wrath within the confines of two time designations: 1) the first half which is lesser tribulation (Matt. 24:9) and 2) the second half (Rev. 11:2; 12:6, 14; 13:5) which is greater tribulation (Matt. 24:21). To move away from these dual time designations of Jesus and create a third one (the Day of the Lord) is to compartmentalize the Day of the Lord and God’s wrath, within a very short and narrow period of time that Jesus never mentions. It also creates an unwarranted time division within Daniel’s 70th week which consists of only two separate time divisions - the beginning of sorrows and greater tribulation or birth pangs.

Of course, the Old Testament does not distinguish between greater or lesser tribulation periods of judgment within the context of the Day of the Lord. Jesus made this distinction. However, it does view the time period of tribulation as a whole unit of seven years which consists of God’s judgment and wrath upon earthly evildoers (Dan. 9:27). Here is the point. Creating three units of time out of these

two time designations that Jesus gave of the Tribulation Period and ignoring the clear implications of God's wrath in each time designation is nothing less than huckstering the Word of God (2 Cor. 4:2).

- When Scripture is taken at face value, without reading into the texts, the Rapture is presented as an imminent, impending, any-moment event (Phil. 3:20; 4:5; 1 Cor. 16:22; James 5:8-9) that Paul taught will take place before the seven-year Tribulation Period (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9-10).

The Rapture is not an event that occurs four or five years or three fourths of the way into the Tribulation Period. The early Church was looking for Christ and not Antichrist! They were not looking for Seal Judgments, but deliverance from the entire period of tribulation, which was designed to punish unsaved earth dwellers that are left behind (Rev. 3:10). However, in Rosenthal's interpretive scheme, the Church must endure Antichrist, the Great Tribulation, and after 64 months into the 70th Week, it will be raptured. Of course, this totally destroys the doctrine of imminency, which Rosenthal calls "untenable." He claims "there simply is no exegetical evidence for pretribulational rapturism" (p.208). Passages like 1 Thess. 5:6; 1 Cor. 1:7; Tit. 2:13 and 1 Jn. 3:2-3 speak of the blessed hope (Titus 2:13) as an imminent event, encouraging the believer to live a life of eager expectancy and anticipation in the glorious truth that Christ could return at any moment. We do not have to face the wrath of the seven-year Tribulation Period. Not wrath, but Rapture!

- Daniel's 70th week has nothing to do with the Church on earth but with Daniel's people ("thy people" – Dan. 9:24) who are the Jews. The same is true regarding the Jewish context of Matthew 24 and the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:15).

According to Rosenthal and his scheme of prophetic events, the Church is mainly on earth and definitely will not be in Heaven during much of the Tribulation Period. His position, like that of the posttribulational view is obviously untenable in light of John 14:1-4, one of the key Rapture passages. Christ promised that He would leave His own on earth to prepare their eternal habitation in Heaven. At His return in the Rapture, He would take them back to the Father's House. The fact of the matter is this, the Church is in Heaven during the seven-year Tribulation Period in the place

that Christ has prepared for His Bride while all the judgments of the Lamb are falling on the earth (Rev. 19:7).

It's interesting that in Marv Rosenthal's book on the prewrath Rapture of the church, he never once explains John 14:1-2, other than referring to it as a datable Scripture mentioned by Sproul (p. 55). Why is this? It's because the promise that Christ gave to His disciples does not fit into the prewrath rapture theory of the Church. Christ's promise of His imminent return ("I will come again" – John 14:3) and their entrance into Heaven ("that where I am, there ye may be also") speaks volumes against the prewrath view. This is because the prewrath theory has Christ returning at a specific time within the Tribulation Period. It also has the Church suffering on earth during much of the seven-year time period, the time when God's saints will be persecuted by the apostate church (Rev. 17:6; 18:24) and at the hands of the Antichrist, causing great multitudes of God's saints to be martyred for their faith (Rev. 7:1-14; 16:6; 20:4).

Is this really the blessed hope of the Church - to experience impending death before an imminent Rapture? Is it a blessed hope to pass through three quarters of the judgments associated with the Tribulation Period? Since all the judgments of the Tribulation Period are proceeding forth from the Lamb and are the expression of God's wrath (Rev. 15:4; 16:7; 19:2), can we really view Rosenthal's Rapture as a blessed hope? How can "sudden destruction" (1 Thess. 5:3) and "the hour of temptation" (trial and adversity) coming upon planet earth (Rev. 3:10) be a blessed hope to God's saints? Such thinking is an absurdity.

In spite of Jesus' promise in John 14:1-3 and the repeated Biblical promises of deliverance from the entire seven-year period of wrath (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9-10), Rosenthal asserts that his compartmentalized and narrow prewrath position of deliverance from the Day of the Lord is "unstrained and biblically accurate" (p.194), that his "evidence is strong and compelling, the reason clear and logical" (p.67). He characterizes his view on the Rapture as one of "simplicity, clarity, logic..., the fruit of an unstrained, clear, unified and normative interpretation of the Word of God." (p.31). It sounds like he is tooting his own horn!

The whole idea that the first six Seal Judgments are an expression of only Satan's or man's wrath and not God's wrath is a case of severe eisegesis. Remember that if it sounds and looks like eisegesis – it is eisegesis! It's very clear that the sovereign

Lamb (the Lord Jesus Christ) is opening these seals – not man or Satan. The scroll which contains these judgments is given to the Lamb (Rev. 5:5) and the contents of judgments are unleashed by the Lamb. This is the wrath of Almighty God being displayed. To deny this is to deny the clear and unmistakable teaching of God’s prophetic word. One thing is certain, brilliant men confuse things brilliantly! Rosenthal and other Rosenthalites and prewrathers are not letting the facts of the Bible speak for themselves.

In summary, the five major problems and glaring factual errors with the prewrath teaching of the Rapture are as follows. First, it denies that the first six Seal Judgments, which are ordained by God, are part of His wrath (Revelation 5—6). A major flaw in the pre-wrath Rapture theory is its teaching that the first seal judgments are not the wrath of God. Scripture shows that it is the Lamb who opens the seals (Revelation 5:5; 6:1). No other man is found worthy to open them (5:3-4). It would seem, then, these are not man’s judgments, but God’s. The tribulation begins when Jesus opens the first seal, and from that point on, the wrath of God is meted out on a sinful world.

Second, it creates three separate time designations within the seven years instead of two, as Jesus taught (Matt. 24:8-22), arbitrarily compartmentalizing the Day of the Lord. If the first birth pangs result in greater birth pangs, then the same birth pangs are in view. They both represent God’s wrath.

Third, it does not view the Day of the Lord as a unified time of God’s wrath and judgment as the Old Testament does. The judgments of the entire End Time 70th week of Daniel is often expressed by the figurative language of the travail connected with childbirth (Isa. 2:11-12; 13:8-9; 66:7-8; Jer. 22:23; 47:41; Hos. 13:13; Mic. 4:9-10; Zeph. 1:14-15). This means that the Day of the Lord (God’s wrath) is not merely associated with a short period of time at the end of the Tribulation Period, but would include the first part of the Tribulation Period, which Jesus specifically described as birth pangs (Matt. 24:8) and the second half of the Tribulation which is designated as “great tribulation” or birth pangs (Matt. 24:21).

Fourth, it denies the dispensational difference between believers of the Church Age and Jewish brethren and tribulation saints (1 Cor. 10:32; Rev. 7:14-15; 20:4). For instance, to keep the Church in the Tribulation Period, this view must conclude that tribulation saints, such as God’s elect (saved Israel) are really the church (Matt.

24:31). One weakness (among many) of the pre-wrath rapture position is its presumption that the “elect” mentioned in Matthew 24:22, 31 are church-age saints. However, Jesus tells those who flee the antichrist’s persecution to pray that their flight does not occur “on the sabbath day” (Matt. 24:20). Since the church is not under the Mosaic law and does not keep the Sabbath, Jesus’ words cannot be directed to the Church.

Fifth, this view denies the imminence of the event of the Rapture. The Bible teaches there is nothing that must happen, including the Antichrist's persecution against believers, before Jesus can return to take home His beloved Bride - His New Testament Church (Titus 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 1 Corinthians 15:50–54). Again, how could the Rapture be a blessed hope of escape and comfort if the Church on a universal scale was destined to be decapitated by the Antichrist (Rev. 20:4)?

There are other strange conclusions of this prewrath Rapture theory which we will not discuss in this study. However, as one lie normally results in another lie, the same is true regarding eschatological error. One prophetic error normally results in another prophetic error to support the previous one. I think one can conclude that the basic thesis of the prewrath theory of the Rapture cannot be supported exegetically, linguistically, or hermeneutically from Scripture.

Harry Ironside used to say:

“Be careful of any teaching that is new, it might not be true.”

Such is the case with the debunked prewrath Rapture theory. The Bible, when understood in its plain sense, does not teach a prewrath Rapture theory that occurs near the end of the Tribulation Period, but a pretribulation Rapture, which is a seven-year prewrath escape from the righteous expression of God’s wrath to be meted out on planet earth (Rev. 3:10).