

The Pretribulation Rapture

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The following scriptures all support a pretribulation rapture:

Daniel's 70 year-weeks

Daniel 9:24-27 describes Israel's divine history since the end of the Babylonian captivity to the start of the Messiah's reign of peace within the chronological framework of 70 year-weeks. During this time, two messiahs will play prominent roles – the true Messiah and the false messiah:

"Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off; but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined. Then he [the false messiah] shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate" (Dan. 9:24-27).

This is one of the clearest pronouncements in the Bible on the dispensational position of Israel since the time of their restoration from the Babylonian captivity in the 5th century BC until the dawn of the Messianic kingdom. A first remark on the 70 weeks (or year-weeks) is that they refer to an exact period. A year-week is seven years long: "Six years you shall sow your field... but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to the Lord (Lev. 25:3-4). After every seven year-weeks, the 50th year, which is the first year of the following week, is celebrated as a jubilee (Lev. 25:8-10).

Modern Israel has re-instituted their biblical year-weeks and in these cycles orthodox Jews celebrate every seventh year as a sabbath. Their present year-week started on 1st Tishri 2001 (September 2001 on the Gregorian calendar) and will be followed by the next year-week on 1st Tishri 2008. Israel observes a lunar

calendar in which each month starts with the new moon and every year on the 1st Tishri (referred to as the *Rosh Hashanah*). Tishri is the first month on Israel's civil calendar, but the seventh month on their religious calendar (Lev. 23:24). The latter commences in the spring month, Nissan, referring to the new life that dawned for Israel during their exodus from Egypt (Ex. 12:2). Since a complete lunar cycle until the next new moon is only 29½ days, a year on the lunar calendar is 354 days long – 11¼ days shorter than a seasonal (or solar) year. Because of this, Israel often have leap years to which a 13th month is added. In this way they harmonise their calendar with seasonal years as Tishri, in the northern hemisphere, should always coincide with autumn when it is harvest time in Israel, being a winter rainfall area.

However, the seventy year-weeks of Daniel are neither solar years nor lunar years, but 490 prophetic years of 360 days each (see Rev. 11:2-3, 12:6 and 13:5 which refers to the two halves of the 70th year-week as 42 months and also as 1260 days, being months of 30 days each). In connection with the prophetic period of 70 year-weeks, we should clearly note the following facts:

- The 70 year-weeks started when the decree was issued to rebuild Jerusalem.
- The period was interrupted at the end of the 69th week when the Messiah was rejected.
- The 70th week will commence when a covenant is concluded with the false messiah.
- Israel will revoke their covenant with the false messiah in the middle of the 70th week.
- The 70 year-weeks will only be concluded when the whole Israel is saved after being individually and nationally reconciled to the Messiah.

When clarity has been obtained about the conclusion of this period, all unbiblical interpretations are nullified. Few people would argue about the beginning of the 70 year-weeks as being the decree by Xerxes in 445 BC that Jerusalem was to be rebuilt by the Jews who were in exile (Neh. 2:1). However, many conflicting assumptions are made about the consummation of the 70 year-weeks. Some people attempt to conclude the entire period of 490 prophetic years at the crucifixion of Christ, while others view the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 as the end of the period. We should always observe the following conditions that will prevail after the final fulfilment of this prophecy, and these promises will only be fulfilled after the second coming of the Messiah and Israel's national reconciliation to Him:

1. At the end of the 490 years God will **finish the transgression** of Israel when they will **make an end of sins** by virtue of the Messiah making **reconciliation for iniquity**. The verb *kala* means to bring something to an end, to finish it. Israel's sin of disobedience will be brought to an end at the Messiah's second coming: "In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1). The atoning work that was in principle done at Calvary will then, in practice, be accepted in faith by the entire Israel. On that day, the remnant of Israel will look on Him whom they have pierced and mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son (Zech. 12:10). "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:26). After this event, the whole nation will be reconciled to God and serve Him with a pure heart (Jer. 32:38-40). A situation like this has never prevailed during the long history of Israel, and clearly indicates that the 70 year-weeks have not yet expired. The presently restored Israel (except for a very small minority of Messianic Jews) reject Jesus as Messiah as clearly as their forefathers of the first century did. A comprehensive national reconciliation with the Messiah should occur before the following prophecy will be fulfilled: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah... I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts: and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for **they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them**, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer. 31:31-34; emphasis added).
2. After Israel have been reconciled to God, **everlasting righteousness** will be brought in **to seal up vision and prophecy** and **to anoint the Most Holy**. The phrase "everlasting righteousness" literally means "righteousness of ages" and is a prophecy that God will establish an age characterised by righteousness. This is a reference to the millennial kingdom (Is. 60:21; Jer. 23:5-6). God will also "seal up vision and prophecy." All that God through the prophets said He would do in fulfilling His covenant with Israel will be fully realised after the 70 year-weeks in the millennial kingdom. The remnant in Israel will then all be saved and restored in their land, and the Messiah will rule over the whole world from the restored throne of David in Jerusalem. This situation clearly does not prevail yet. Until all these prophecies are finally fulfilled they remain unsealed. When the "Anointed One" (the Messiah) has come God will "anoint the Most Holy." His servants, the seat of government in Jerusalem, as well as the millennial temple, will be holy to the Lord.

Since the year-weeks are recognised units of time in Israel's chronology we are here dealing with a very literal and exact prophecy. From the going forth of the command to restore Jerusalem, seven year-weeks have elapsed until the city, the temple and the wall around the city were built. Subsequently, another 62 year-

weeks of troubled times elapsed during which Jerusalem was occupied and further expanded until the coming of the Messiah. In total, 69 year-weeks have elapsed until the Anointed One would be cut off (the crucifixion of the Messiah). History indeed proves that 69 year-weeks (483 prophetic years) have elapsed since 1 Nissan 445 BC when King Artaxerxes granted permission to Nehemiah on to rebuild Jerusalem (Neh. 2:1-8), until the crucifixion of Messiah on 14 Nissan 32 AD. The period of 483 prophetic years of 360 days each represents 173 880 days. If this number is divided by $365\frac{1}{4}$ it equals 476,06 years on our Gregorian calendar. On this calendar, the period of 69 year-weeks elapsed between 23rd March 445 BC and Friday, 11th April 32 AD, and was terminated on the day when Jesus was crucified. All that then remained in the divine history of Israel as a nation until the dawning of the Messianic reign was seven years – the 70th year-week of Daniel, when Israel will conclude a covenant with the false messiah.

It is obvious that the rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah would interrupt Israel's divine history. Jesus told the Jews that their house (Jerusalem) would be destroyed and become desolate because they rejected Him as their promised Messiah-King (Matt. 23:37-38). In consequence, He would leave them until a future time when they will accept Him as their Messiah: "For I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!'" (Matt. 23:39).

Before Israel would be restored to their land, with an own government that can take decisions on the rebuilding of the temple and conclude a national covenant with the Messiah or the false messiah, they would first, for a long time, be dispersed among the nations while the time of Gentiles takes its course. Jesus said to them that they would "be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). This clearly implies that, in the last days, Israel would be restored to the land which God gave to their fathers: "Thus says the Lord GOD: Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land" (Ezek. 37:21). The Jewish population of Israel has grown to 5,4 million in 2004, which is almost the same figure as that of the American Jews. By about 2007, Israel will have the largest Jewish population in the world. That will constitute an important demographic turning point as Israel will then, since the start of the Diaspora in AD 70, have the largest concentration of Jews anywhere in the world. According to orthodox rabbis, the Israeli government will only then

be in a position to take binding decisions and conclude covenants on behalf of all Jews.

Seven years before the second coming of the Messiah Israel will, during the 70th year-week, conclude a covenant with the false messiah. Jesus clearly warned them against this serious mistake: "I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive" (John 5:43). It is clear that the interruption in the 70 year-weeks followed on the rejection of the Messiah, and will last until the day when Israel concludes a covenant with the false messiah. On that day, the countdown of the last seven years of their divined history before the start of the Messiah's millennial reign will begin.

We are now living in the time of the progressive restoration of Israel and their capital city, Jerusalem. That is a clear indication that the 70th year-week of their divine history since the end of the Babylonian captivity will soon begin. According to Daniel 9:26-27 it will take effect when a "prince who is to come" (the Antichrist, or false messiah), will conclude a covenant with Israel and many other nations. His appearance will probably coincide with the prophesied Russo-Arab war in Israel (Ezek. 38-39), in which he will claim credit for the victory. At a critical moment, he will come to the rescue of Israel and will also be praised by all nations for having averted a threatening third world war and an international economic collapse.

These highly dramatic events will greatly influence the Jewish people, their government and their religious leaders. They will become even more excited when this self-declared messiah claims the throne of David by producing deceptive 'evidence' that he is a direct descendant of David. Israel will conclude a covenant with him – thereby officially recognising him as the promised Messiah. He will grant them the right to rebuild the temple and re-institute the sacrificial service, as that would be a clear sign of the continued rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus and His once for all sacrifice on the cross.

During the celebrations that will mark the inauguration of the false messiah, a spiritual revival will occur in which 144 000 Jews will accept Jesus Christ (Yeshua Ha Mashiach) as the true Messiah (Rev. 7:4) and outrightly reject their government's covenant with Satan's "angel of light." Their public stand against the false messiah will lead to severe persecution against them. The false peace of the Antichrist will only last for 3½ years. In the middle of the week of seven years he will enter the Most Holy place of the rebuilt temple and declare himself to be

God (2 Thess. 2:4). An image of him will be placed in the Holy of holies and all people everywhere commanded to worship his image (Rev. 13:14-15). Israel's sacrificial service will then be terminated: "In the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations there shall be one who makes desolate" (Dan. 9:27).

Israel will be greatly disillusioned when they realise that they have been worshipping a false messiah who pretends to be God Himself. They will immediately terminate their covenant with him. On that day the Jews will have to flee for their lives as the false messiah will perpetrate genocide against them (Matt. 24:15-22). Daniel also refers to this terrible time of persecution, when flattery will also be used to deceive many Jews:

"And forces shall be mustered by him [the false messiah], and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily *sacrifices*, and place *there* the abomination of desolation. Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery; but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out *great exploits*. And those of the people who understand shall instruct many; yet *for many* days they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plundering. Now when they fall, they shall be aided with a little help; but many shall join with them by intrigue. And *some* of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purge *them*, and make *them* white, *until* the time of the end; because *it is* still for the appointed time. Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god" (Dan. 11:31-36).

This arrogant leader "shall come to his end, and no one will help him" (Dan. 11:45). The true Messiah will destroy him during His second coming (2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 19:19-20). That will bring about a sudden end to his seven year reign of terror and thus also the end to the 70th year-week of Daniel.

From the prophecies on the 70 year-weeks of Israel's history before the Messiah's reign it is evident that Israel would "cut off" the true Messiah at the end of 69 year-weeks, thereby rejecting God's divine plan for the nation, become dispersed from their land, and that, just before the start of the 70th week, they would be back in their land in great numbers to conclude a covenant with the false messiah.

These prophetic events indisputably underscore the fact that the entire 70th week will be an integral part of Israel's divine history and thus not a part of the church dispensation. The church dispensation, which coincides with the temporary rejection and long international dispersion of Israel, must first be concluded before the 70th year-week can commence.

At the end of the 70th year-week there will be a highly dramatic intervention by God in the history of the Jewish people. It will prevent the false messiah's attempted annihilation of Israel and lead to their salvation by being reconciled to the Messiah when He comes. Everlasting righteousness will then be brought to Israel, and all of them will serve God with one accord through the Messiah. The culmination of their divine history will occur during the subsequent thousand year-reign of the Messiah. All nations will seek their favour as it will be evident that God is with them in a very special way (Zech. 8:22-23).

The 70th year-week will be just as literal as the first 69 year-weeks between Israel's restoration from the Babylonian captivity and the rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah. The Bible clearly states that the last year-week will be counted in years (7 years, or 2X3½ years), in months (2X42 months) and even in days (2X1260 days). The only unknown factor is the time when the church dispensation will be terminated by the rapture, leading to the revelation of the Antichrist and his seven-year covenant with Israel and the nations. The advanced stage of Israel's restoration in their land since the budding of the fig tree in 1948, as well as Jerusalem's constitutional restoration in 1980 as Israel's capital city, are indicators that the final year-week is at hand.

It should also be emphasised that the true church of the Messiah is withholding the revelation of the false messiah (2 Thess. 2:6-8) and must first be taken out of the way before the false messiah can appear. There is dispensationally no possibility of a co-existence of the true church and the Antichrist during the first 42 months of the tribulation period.

Withholders

Noah and Lot had to remonstrate with the ungodly people of their time with persistent warnings. Christian believers of the church era have an even greater responsibility to fulfil their role as the salt of a corrupt earth and the light of a dark world. The church indwelt by the Holy Spirit is opposing the iniquitous

spirit of the Antichrist in advance of his coming: "And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of

lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains *will do so* until he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders" (2 Thess. 2:6-9).

"The great and the terrible day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31) will not come prior to the rapture and the subsequent revelation of Antichrist. That awful period of judgement will be preceded by a great "falling away" (2 Thess. 2:3). This Greek term (*apostasia*) literally means "to depart". When the truth departs, the lie prevails. When Christians depart at the rapture, spiritual darkness will prevail on earth.

While Christians remain on earth they are expected to make a bold stand for the truth, thus restraining the build-up of antichristian forces. After their departure at the rapture, the Antichrist will be able to take over the world unopposed. A spirit of delusion will then prevail and, as "the man of sin" (2 Thess. 2:3), the Antichrist will display to the entire world a personal example of an utterly amoral, godless life-style.

The Antichrist cannot be revealed until the one who restrains him has been taken out of the way. This role is fulfilled by the church as the body of Christ indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Do not attach any credibility to the theory that the rapture will occur in the middle of the tribulation period of seven years. After 3½ years the Antichrist will break his covenant with Israel, desecrate the temple and declare himself to be God (Dan. 9:27, 11:36-37; Matt. 24:15-21; 2 Thess. 2:4). Then Israel will have to flee to the wilderness for survival (Matt. 24:16; Rev. 12:14). This flight to the wilderness in the middle of the seven-year tribulation period is not to be confused with the rapture. It is something quite different.

The unscriptural teaching of a mid-tribulation or a post-tribulation rapture leads to a warped perspective and wrong priorities. Instead of awaiting the coming of Christ, people are awaiting the Antichrist. In this way they compromise their commitment to Christ. Instead of striving for sanctification in expectation of the imminent coming of the heavenly Bridegroom, they start planning an earthly survival strategy for the tribulation period. Such activities are irrelevant as they are motivated by a distorted prophetic vision of future events.

The command to us is not to prepare for the coming of the Antichrist, but for the coming of Jesus Christ! We should remain engaged in His work until He comes. If we are constantly occupied with the work assigned to us by Christ, we will not be on earth when the Antichrist is revealed. People who think that they can calculate the time of the rapture by waiting for the Antichrist to come and then add another 3½ years until the Lord comes, are missing the point and also a very important aspect of the prophecies.

The Bridegroom comes to fetch His bride

During His *parousia*, which will of necessity precede the visible coming, the heavenly Bridegroom comes only to fetch His bride. On this occasion He will not show Himself to the millions of other people on earth at all.

In biblical times the Jewish bridegroom, after his betrothal, would depart for a lengthy period to prepare an apartment in the house of his father for his bride and himself. Having done so, he would then return to her home secretly at night to be reunited with her and take her with him to his father's house, where the marriage feast would be held. This is analogous to Jesus preparing a place for us in the Father's house and returning to take us there as promised: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, *there ye may be also*" (John 14:2-3).

Christ's coming at His *parousia* will be the fulfilment of that promise, also of the promise which was made to His followers at the time of His ascension: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

In the traditional Jewish marriage, the bride was taken to the *huppah* for seven days before being shown to the guests at the wedding. The seven days were the consummation of the marriage. Prophetically, it points to the seven years of the bride's absence between the rapture and her public revelation (cf. Rev. 19:7-8).

Chronology of Revelation

The rapture of the church to heaven before the coming tribulation period is also clearly evident from the chronology of the events described in the book of Revelation. In these events, the true church of Christ mysteriously vanishes from the earth before the start of the tribulation period, only to re-appear when Christ comes back after the seven years. The believers of the tribulation period do not

constitute the church. The main events in the book of Revelation occur in the following order:

- The glorified Christ after His ascension (chap. 1).
- The dispensation of the church on earth (chap. 2-3).
- The heavenly vision, including the glorified church after the rapture (chap. 4-5).
- The seven years of the tribulation period (chap. 6-18).
- The Second Coming of Christ, accompanied by His saints and the armies of heaven (chap. 19).
- The millennial reign of Christ and His glorified saints (chap. 20:1-6).
- The final judgement (chap. 20:7-15).
- The new heaven and the new earth (chap. 21-22).

After describing the church on earth in Revelation 2-3, it is subsequently shown in its glorified state in heaven in Revelation 4-5. Chapter 4 opens with the words, "After this" (Greek *meta tauta*), which clearly indicates that the events which follow are in chronological order. This expression often occurs in the book of Revelation, thereby confirming its general chronological ordering of events.

During the dispensation of the church (chap. 2-3) the following words are repeated seven times: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev. 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). The believers of the tribulation period, who are saved after the rapture, do not represent the church. To them it is merely said: "If any man have an ear, let him hear" (Rev. 13:9). In Revelation 19:7-14 we again read about the church as the wife of the Lamb, who will return with Him to earth after the tribulation period.

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