

Sequencing the Tribulation, Parousia, and Wrath

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- March 31, 2013

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Thank you for joining us on Resurrection Sunday. I hope we all were able to spend some time this weekend meditating on the significance of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus that occurred almost two thousand years ago at this very time of the year. The bodily resurrection of Jesus, which occurred early on that Sunday morning, is the foundation of our Faith. Without that event, there would be no Christianity, and we would not be here today studying the Bible.
- B. In this session, we will be looking at the words of our Passover Lamb (Jesus) in Matthew 24, which were spoken to His disciples on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem, on Tuesday afternoon the day before Peter and John prepared the Last Supper in the upper room. If you would like to see a good study of the chronology of the final week of Jesus there in Jerusalem, before His arrest, crucifixion and resurrection, I would recommend the work of Romney Ashton called, *The Sequential Gospels*. It can be obtained from Amazon.com.
- C. **Before we begin I want to mention the Lesson Outlines for These Podcasts:** There is a PDF available for each podcast. Most listeners find it helpful to have it open in front of them as they listen. If you would like to get the PDF, simply email me and request it. If you are planning on being a regular listener to this program, and would like to automatically receive the PDF as soon as it is ready, without having to request it each time, simply email me and ask to be put on the **PDF List**. The PDF contains all my lesson notes and resource references, so that you do not have to write them down while listening. It is free for the asking. My email address is: <preterist1@preterist.org>
- D. Let's ask God for His presence and blessing on our study here --
Dear Heavenly Father, we praise Your Holy Name for sending your Son to die in our place. We deserve nothing but Your wrath, yet You graciously provided the sacrifice that would appease Your wrath and reconcile us to Yourself. You proved that Jesus accomplished that Atonement and Redemption for us by raising Him from the dead. Thank you so much for your mercy and grace. What an amazing salvation you have provided for us. His resurrection and ascension gives us hope for a new immortal body and eternal life in heaven with you. By remembering the suffering and death of Your Dear Son on Passover so many years ago, may we all be inspired to rededicate our lives to your worship and to the service of others. Use our studies here to advance your kingdom and bring You much glory throughout all generations of the age of ages. It is in the Name of our precious Savior, and Your Only Begotten Son, that we pray. Amen.
- E. I get emails every week from listeners all over the country and around the world, thanking us for these historical studies which have helped them understand the Bible better. If you have benefited from these podcasts, we would encourage you to become partners with us in this teaching and publishing ministry, to enable us to share it with many others, and so that you will share in all the good fruit that comes

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- F. Last time we looked at the Neronic persecution and the intense Tribulation it brought upon the Church in AD 64. This time we will try to wrap up that study by looking at the tribulation on the church and the wrath outpouring which followed. We need to put these events in their proper sequence, in the order in which they actually occurred historically. When we do that, it will really help us understand the Olivet Discourse, and the book of Revelation.

One of the reasons all of us misinterpreted Matthew 24 for so many years is because we failed to understand the concept of Parousia, as well as the sequence of events that were supposed to occur at the Parousia.

Growing up in the Baptist church as a futurist, my concept of the Second Coming was a one-day event, when Christ would split the sky and round up all His saints (living and dead) just before the globe was engulfed in a thermo-nuclear meltdown. All of that was supposed to happen not only in one day's time, but "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye."

That was my concept of the Second Coming -- a "blink of the eye" event. There was no thought whatsoever of an extended period of time in which Christ would be present to reward His people and judge His enemies.

But when I became a Preterist, I began to notice all the things that Jesus and the Apostles promised that He would accomplish at His return, many of which implied much more than a one-day "blink of the eye" event.

Then I found out that the word Parousia literally means an extended visit, or a presence with someone for an extended period of time. It is this extended visit idea that will really help us here in our understanding of the Olivet Discourse and its statements about the Great Tribulation.

Before we get into the text, we need to get that chart in front of us, the one called *Chronological Arrangement of the Olivet Discourse*. It is one of the two PDFs that I sent all of you who are on the PDF List. Hopefully you have that printed out by now, or can view it on the screen while I comment on it.

We will look at three different sections of that chart, beginning with page 4, then skip back to pages 2 and 3, and finally skipping forward to pages 5 and 6. How is that for a confusing study plan? Spend some time with the chart and I think you will be okay.

Sequencing the Tribulation in Relation to the Parousia, the Rescue, and the Wrath-Outpouring

A. We need to know what the Tribulation period is, and how it fits into the overall sequence of events mentioned in Matt. 24.

1. We know from several New Testament texts that the faithful elect Christians would have to suffer persecution and tribulation before the Parousia, but would NOT have to go through the wrath-outpouring at the Parousia. For instance:

- 1 Thess 5:9 - For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation...
- Rom 5:9 - ...how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath...
- 1 Thess 1:10 - ...wait for His Son from heaven... who rescues us from the wrath to come
- Rev 3:10 - I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is about to come upon the whole world...

2. We also know **when that wrath was supposed to be poured out**. It was during the Parousia after the saints were rescued out of harm's way. We see this very sequence of events laid out for us in Paul's two letters to the Thessalonians:
 - a. In 1 Thess. 1:10 Paul taught that the saints would be rescued from the wrath that would be poured out on their persecutors. That means:
 - (1) The **tribulation and persecution of the saints** comes first,
 - (2) Followed by their **rescue** out of that tribulation at the Parousia,
 - (3) Just before the **wrath is poured out** upon their persecutors.
 - b. That same sequence is found in 2 Thess 1:4-10 where Paul indicates that at the coming of Christ He would do these two things in this particular order:
 - (1) Give **relief** to the saints (2 Thess 1:7)
 - (2) Deal out **retribution** to the disobedient (2 Thess 1:8)
 - c. So, here is the order of events: **tribulation** on the church first, **rescue** of the saints from the tribulation at the Parousia, then the **wrath** is poured out on the wicked.
 - d. Repeat that sequence three times out loud: **Tribulation, Parousia, Rescue, Wrath (TPRW)**
 - e. Keep that sequence clearly in mind as we look at Matthew 24
3. Furthermore, it is clear from looking at the statements in these two Thessalonian letters that Paul is drawing this sequence of events out of the Olivet Discourse.
4. Several Bible teachers, both preterists and futurists, have found almost two dozen similarities and connections between the Olivet Discourse and Paul's statements here in these two letters.
5. Since Paul was speaking under inspiration, his statements have to be in perfect harmony with the words of Jesus, and vice versa.
6. This means that the sequence of events has to be the same in both the Olivet Discourse and the Thessalonian letters.
7. That seems obvious to us, but it is not so obvious to the Pre-Trib Rapture guys like Tommy Ice, who try to ignore the sequence in Paul's epistles and obfuscate the sequence found in the Olivet Discourse.
8. So, we need to take a look at the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 to see if we can find the same sequence of events there.
9. Let's start by looking at Matthew 24:15-22 (use the [Chronological chart](#) that I sent)

B. Take some time to familiarize yourself with the context surrounding these three sections of the chart: Mt. 24:1-14, 24:15-21, and 24:22-31.

C. The Problem Defined: One thing we notice right away when we look at Matt. 24:15-22 is that the "great tribulation" mentioned in verse 21 seems to occur AFTER the Abomination of Desolation appeared and the Christians fled from Jerusalem and Judea.

1. If the Abomination of Desolation (v. 15) was the arrival of Roman armies around Jerusalem in AD 66, then the flight of saints away from there (vv. 16-20) is part of the great tribulation (v. 21) which would be cut short for the elect saints (but not for the unbelieving Jews).
2. But there is a problem with this scenario. The futurists (and even some preterists) assume that the **tribulation** mentioned here in verses 16-28 is ONLY talking about the **wrath** that was poured out upon the Jews during their war with Rome.
3. If that is the case, then it means that the saints did not suffer tribulation until after the war started, and their rescue from that tribulation could not have come until after the war started.
4. Furthermore, it is clear from Matt 24:29 (and its parallel in Mark 13:24) that Christ would not come until "after the tribulation of those days." In the previous context it seems that the "tribulation of those days" is a reference to the "the days of vengeance" and "wrath to this people," acc. to Luke's account (Lk 21:22-23).
5. This means that Christ would not come until AFTER the wrath-outpouring was finished, which was after AD 70. And if Christ did not come until AFTER the wrath was poured out, then the saints were not rescued out of the wrath after all. This means the saints had to endure the whole tribulation (or wrath-outpouring).
6. Notice the sequence here -- Matthew 24 has the wrath already being poured out before Christ came to pour it out! (**T-W-P-R**)
7. But Paul has already indicated that the saints would NOT have to go through the wrath. Christ would "rescue them from the coming wrath" before that wrath came (1 Th. 1:10)! (**T-P-R-W**)
8. Do you see the sequencing problem there? Now, how do we solve it?

D. The Problem Solved:

1. Notice that Matt 24:29 says that Christ does not come until "after the tribulation of those days." What is the "tribulation of those days"? In the previous context, it seems to be the wrath-outpouring during the war with Rome. But if we define the Great Tribulation as **ONLY** being the wrath that was poured out on Jerusalem, then it means that Christ did not come to rescue his saints and pour out the wrath UNTIL the wrath had already been poured out and the "tribulation of those days" was already over.
2. The solution must therefore be related to our definition of the "tribulation." If the tribulation is only talking about the troubles that came upon the Jews after the war broke out in Judea, then we have a seeming contradiction between Jesus and Paul.
3. However, if we define the tribulation as the whole period of persecution upon the church (including the Neronian persecution) and their difficulties in Judea just before the Parousia and the outbreak of the war, then it would solve the problem. The tribulation then must include the persecution on the church that occurred before

the wrath was poured out. The only question is whether the context will allow that redefinition, as well as the reassignment of some verses to that tribulation on the church? This was the idea behind my chart, and as we can see from comparing the four different accounts of the synoptic apocalypse, none of the accounts were in strict chronological sequence anyway. So, that implies that we are free to rearrange them according to the sequence in which they actually occur.

4. This means that the tribulation upon the church and the wrath upon the Jews are two successive phases of the one combined tribulation-wrath period. The tribulation has to be first, before the wrath outpouring. If we run that definition of tribulation back through the context, like I have arranged it in my chart, it will work.
5. Notice these texts especially:
 - a. **Matt 24:9-14** -- "tribulation" here applies ONLY to the Christians, and seems to refer to the intensification of the persecution under Nero
 - b. **Matt 24:22-28** -- returns to talking about the "tribulation" upon the Church -- compare the language here in this section with the language in Matt 24:9-14.
6. Do you see the connection? They are both talking about the tribulation upon the Christians. Therefore, Matt 24:29 HAS TO INCLUDE the Neronic persecution in its definition of "tribulation" since that is what the previous verses (22-28) are talking about. It was "those days" (Neronic persecution) that were cut short for the saints, so that the "elect" could be rescued.
7. Notice that Christ had already stated in the previous context that He would "save" them from the tribulation by "cutting short" the tribulation. But the wrath-outpouring was not "cut short" for the Jews. It continued until Jerusalem was totally devastated. So, it must be some other tribulation that was cut short, besides the wrath-outpouring. That could be the tribulation upon the church, such as the Neronic persecution.
8. But that raises another question: How could the tribulation on the Christians be said to be "cut short" (or ended) if the Christians were still left around on earth while the wrath was being poured out? That means they would still be subject to persecution and tribulation. What kind of "salvation" or "rescue" would that be? Nor would it fit Jesus' description of the angelic gathering of the elect mentioned in Matt 24:31.
9. Notice all the references to "cut short" (**24:22**) and "saved" (**24:13, 22**). This is not talking about the saints finally getting forgiveness of sins given to them when the tribulation was cut short! They already had forgiveness of sins. So, what was this "**cutting short**" of the tribulation which "**saved**" the elect? How was their tribulation cut short, and how were they saved from it? We already know how Paul would answer that ("**rescues** us from the coming wrath" - 1 Thess 1:10). And Jesus does not leave us guessing either. Notice **Matt 24:31**. At the Parousia He sent forth his angels to **gather the elect** (the remaining living saints) out of harm's way before he poured out the wrath on the Jews.

Well, that will wrap it up for this time. If any of our listeners have questions or comments about what we looked at here in this session, do not hesitate to email me. My email address is: preterist1@preterist.org

Thanks so much for listening.

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If you would like a couple of great books which detail all of these events, I would recommend **ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS** by F. F. Bruce, which is available for order at our website (www.preterist.org), and **JEWISH BACKGROUNDS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT** by J. Julius Scott, which is available from Amazon.com. Be sure to get a copy of my book, **First Century Events**, which deals with the Roman, Jewish, and Christian events of the first century. We will be using it as a resource here in our studies of the first century. You can purchase it from our website: www.preterist.org

Some further recommended reading:

Josephus *Antiquities* and *Wars* (sections which deal with the Herodian rulers)