

Rapture, Pre-Wrath View

Robert Van Kampen was the inventor of the three-quarters rapture theory in the late 1970s. That title is a misnomer, since pre-tribulationism is 100% pre-wrath. If we follow consistency in labeling, Van Kampen's view should be called the "three-quarters" rapture view since he teaches that the church will be raptured somewhere in the middle of the last three and a half years of the 70th week of Daniel. Van Kampen spent a number of years searching for an advocate of his newly developed viewpoint until he was finally able to persuade Marvin Rosenthal to adopt and champion his new theory. Rosenthal wrote a book called *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, in 1990. Later Van Kampen came out with his own book called *The Sign*. He then had published *The Rapture Question Answered: Plain and Simple* (1997).

The pre-Wrath view is a blend of mid-Tribulational and post-Tribulational rationale. Instead of seeing the 24 terms describing the 70th week of Daniel as denoting various characteristics of a single period, Van Kampen chops them into compartmental segments that contain either the wrath of man and Satan or the wrath of God. Through redefinition, Van Kampen limits the wrath of God to the final year and three-quarters of the seven-year period and deduces that the Rapture occurs right before that time period. Van Kampen distinguishes the Rapture and the Second Coming with a gap of one and three-quarters years between them.

The best way to understand the pre-Wrath view is to understand how they divide the Tribulation period into *three* distinct phases:

First, the "beginning of sorrows" is the label given to the first-half of the Tribulation. This segment represents the three-and-one-half year time period from the beginning of the seven-year period with the signing of the peace treaty between the Antichrist and unbelieving Israel and terminating with the Antichrist's desecration of the rebuilt Jewish temple at the Tribulation's midpoint. Sometimes the pre-Wrath view, based upon Matt 24:4-8, refer to this segment as "unexpected soft labor pains." The pre-Wrath view contends that the first four seal judgments (Rev 6:1-8) will transpire during this time period.

Second, the next major section of the Tribulation period, according to the pre-wrath view, is called the "Great Tribulation." This segment will begin with the desecration of the temple by the Antichrist at the Tribulation's midpoint when he will erect a pagan statue in the rebuilt Jewish temple (Dan 9:27; 12:11; Matt 24:15; 2 Thess 2:3-4; Rev 13:15). Apparently, this segment will be initiated with the opening of the fifth seal judgment (Rev 6:9-11) and will conclude with the opening of the sixth seal judgment (Rev 6:12-17). This section will last roughly twenty- one months. During this time period, both the wrath of Satan and man through the Antichrist will be brought forth in an unprecedented manner (Matt. 24:21-22; Rev. 12:12-17). It is during this period of time that the restrainer (2 Thess. 2:6-7), who pre-wrath rapturists interpret as Michael the Archangel, will stand aside and cease from restraining evil and satanic lawlessness. Pre-wrath rapturists are careful to note that only the wrath of man through the Antichrist or Satan's wrath have been exhibited up until this point of the Tribulation period. In other words, the wrath of God will be absent from the Tribulation period's first sixty-three months.

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Third, the final section of the Tribulation period, according to the pre-Wrath view, is known as the "Day of the Lord." The opening of the sixth seal judgment (Rev 6:12-17), with its cosmic disturbances, will herald the rapidly approaching Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord will begin with the opening of the seventh seal judgment (Rev 8:1-6) and will continue as the angels sound the various trumpet judgments (Rev 8:7—11:19). It too will last 21 months, and it is during this segment that the world for the first time will experience divine wrath during the Tribulation. The pre-Wrath view is also quick to note that God's wrath is not mentioned in the Book of Revelation until the events surrounding the sixth seal judgment (Rev 6:16-17). The Rapture will occur prior to the Day of the Lord. Pre-wrath rapturists place the rapture at this juncture since they maintain that the Bible only promises that believers will be delivered from God's wrath (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Rom. 5:9) rather than from tribulation. Since, according to this scheme, the wrath of God will not exist until the Tribulation period's final twenty-one months, the church will be present for the Tribulation period's first sixty-three months. Thus, the seventh seal judgment will not only launch the Day of the Lord, or the Tribulation period's final twenty-one months, but also the rapture of the church.

Seven General Problems with the Pre-Wrath Rapture View

First, the pre-wrath rapture view places the church, a distinct spiritual organism, into Daniel's Seventieth Week, which is a time period when God will be exclusively dealing with national Israel (Dan 9:24).

Second, the pre-Wrath view denies the imminent return of Christ. Earlier in this series we noted how the Rapture is the very next event on the prophetic horizon. It is a signless event that can transpire at any moment. This is why the NT constantly exhorts believers to be looking for Christ's imminent return (John 14:3; 1 Thess 1:10; 4:15; 1 Cor 1:7; 15:51; Phil 3:20; Titus 2:13; James 5:8) rather than to be focused on the Antichrist, the rebuilding of the Temple, or some other prophetic sign as the very next event on the prophetic horizon. The pre-Wrath view, by placing the Rapture in the middle of the second half of the Tribulation period, denies the idea that it is imminent. Instead, an entire prophetic scenario consisting of roughly three-fourths of the Tribulation period must first transpire.

Third, pre-wrath rapturism denies the comfort that the rapture is designed to bring to the believer. As noted earlier in this series, the New Testament frequently mentions comfort when the rapture is presented (John 14:1; 1 Thess. 4:18; Titus 2:13). As noted previously, this notion of comfort harmonizes well with the pretribulational rapture position, which teaches that the church will be kept out of Daniel's Seventieth Week entirely. However, where is the comfort in pre-wrath rapturism? How can the biblical passages related to comfort be honestly harmonized with a belief that says before experiencing the hope of the rapture, the church must first endure the diabolical reign of the Antichrist, wars and rumors of war, famine, pestilence, the death of a quarter of the world's population, wide-scale martyrdom, and unprecedented cosmic disturbances (Rev. 6:1-8)?

Fourth, pre-wrath rapturism imposes an artificial and unnatural construct upon Daniel's Seventieth Week (Dan. 9:27). Any intellectually honest reading of this important prophecy will see that it will encompass a seven-year period comprised of two equal three-and-one-half year periods. The eschatological event demarcating these halves from one another will be the Antichrist's desecration of the Temple at the Tribulation's midpoint. The Book of Revelation builds upon this foundation by simply adding details. Revelation focuses on the different halves of the seven-year Tribulation period by calling the reader's attention to them through the use of various synonyms. Such synonyms include "forty-two months" (Rev. 11:2; 13:5), "one thousand two hundred and sixty days" (Rev. 12:6), and a "times time and half a time" (Dan. 12:7; Rev. 11:3; 12:14). These are all different ways of saying "three and one-half years."

The pre-wrath rapture view ignores this basic two-part structure by imposing a three-part or tri-pirate concept upon Daniel's Seventieth Week. As mentioned in the last article, according to pre-wrath rapturism, the first half of Daniel's Seventieth Week will be the "beginning of sorrows." The second part will be the "Great Tribulation" and will last an additional twenty-one months beyond the Tribulation's midpoint. The third part will constitute the "Day of the Lord" and will comprise the final twenty one months of Daniel's Seventieth Week. This alleged tripartite structure is foreign and artificially imposed upon Daniel 9:27. This three part structure is also a notion that is not honored or referenced by any other New Testament writer who comments upon or adds clarifying details to Daniel 9:27.

Fifth, pre-wrath rapturism is problematic in that it confines the wrath of God to the final quarter of the Tribulation period and fails to recognize that the entire Seventieth Week of Daniel actually represents God's wrath. It is lexically and grammatically difficult, if not impossible, to embrace the argument advanced by the pre-wrath rapturist that the actual wrath of the Lamb does not really begin until the opening of the sixth seal judgment (Rev. 6:12-17). Revelation 6:16-17 says, "and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne and from the **wrath of the Lamb**; for the great day of **their wrath has come**, and who is able to stand?'"

Sixth, while the pre-wrath rapture labels the first half of the second half of the Tribulation period (from the forty-second to the sixty-third month) as "the Great Tribulation," Christ's prophecy concerning the Great Tribulation would necessitate it being even greater than the Day of the Lord or the final quarter of Daniel's Seventieth Week. The PRE-WRATH view teaches that the Day of the Lord begins after the Great Tribulation and that the Day of the Lord is the time of God's wrath. Matthew 24:21, Daniel 12:1 and Jeremiah 30:7 all teach that the Great Tribulation is the greatest time of trouble that the world has ever known. Therefore, if the Day of the Lord is distinct from the Great Tribulation, then the Day of the Lord must be LESS SEVERE than the Great Tribulation.

Seventh, the pre-wrath interpretation that the restrainer (2 Thess. 2:6-7) represents Michael the Archangel is problematic. As noted earlier, pre-wrath rapture advocates contend that Michael will step aside from his function of restraining the Antichrist during the Great Tribulation. However, as noted earlier in this series,² the problem with identifying Michael as the restrainer is that Jude 9 tells us that Michael is reluctant to contest Satan, when it says, "But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" Therefore, consistency seems to dictate that Michael would also

be unwilling to actively contribute to the present restraining of the satanically controlled Antichrist.

In addition, it is unlikely that Michael is the restrainer since the restrainer holds back the Antichrist from making his global debut (2 Thess. 2:6-7) while Michael is more focused on protecting national Israel (Dan. 12:1). Furthermore, how could the restrainer, who at some point stops restraining (2 Thess. 2:6-7), be Michael since Michael never stops protecting Israel?

The Pre-Wrath and Mid-Trib Problem

Two of the other rapture positions view the nature of the tribulation very differently.

Proponents of the pre-wrath rapture agree that Church age believers will be spared from the wrath of God but limit the time of God's wrath to the final part of the tribulation.

According to them, all the destruction in the first three-fourths of the tribulation is due to the wrath of man and the wrath of Satan. The wrath of God or Day of the Lord begins with the seventh seal. The events of the sixth seal are the sign of the Day of the Lord.

Proponents of the pre-wrath rapture place the rapture between the sixth and seventh seal judgments.

Similarly, the mid-Tribulation view argues that God's wrath is not poured out until the last half of the Tribulation. They believe that Christians will be caught up just before the wrath of God begins. Most mid-tribbers place the rapture at the blowing of the seventh trumpet in Rev 11:15-17.

The problem with these two views is that all 19 judgments in Rev 6-18 are God's wrath. The Seal Judgments, which are opened at the very beginning of the Tribulation, are brought forth not by man or Satan, but by the Lamb Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev 6:1). They are Messianic judgments. Jesus opens the seals and an angel calls each of the four horsemen to ride across the earth in judgment. To say that the wrath of God is limited to the last half or last fourth of the Tribulation ignores the source of the seven seal judgments that commence the seven-year tribulation. Moreover, while the word "wrath" is not found in Revelation until 6:16-17, the famine, sword, pestilence, and wild beasts in the first four seal judgments are often associated with God's wrath in other places in the Bible (Jer 14:12; 15:2; 24:10; 29:17; Ezek 5:12,17; 14:21).

During the Tribulation, the terror and destruction will be worldwide in scope, not just limited to a few locations. In the Tribulation, there will be disasters of unimaginable horror and global scope. There are 7 Seal judgments, 7 Trumpet judgments, and 7 Bowl judgments.

These series of judgments will be poured out successively during the Tribulation. One-half of the earth's population will perish in just two of the 19 tribulation judgments. In the fourth seal judgment, one-fourth of the world will die (Rev 6:8), and in the fifth trumpet judgment one-third will perish (Rev 9:18). The entire environment of the planet will be destroyed. Rev 16:19-21 graphically pictures the worldwide devastation: "And the cities of the nations fell.... And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men."

The post-Tribulation view believe the Church will be left here on earth to go through this entire terrible time of devastation. They believe that God will protect His people during this time. But with the global extent of these judgments it is difficult to imagine how believers could be spared. The world will be swallowed up by the tsunami of God's judgment.

These verses from Revelation highlight that God Himself and the Lamb are the source of this wrath against the world from start to finish. In each verse I have italicized the mention of God's wrath.

- Rev 6:16-17: "...and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from *the wrath of the Lamb*; for the great day of their *wrath* has come; and who is able to stand?'"
- Rev 11:18: "And the nations were enraged, and *Thy wrath came*, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to Thy bondservants the prophets and to the saints and to those who fear Thy name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth."
- Rev 14:10: "...he also will drink of the wine of the *wrath of God*, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb."
- Rev 14:19: "And the angel swung his sickle to the earth, and gathered clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great winepress of the *wrath of God*."
- Rev 15:1: "And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the *wrath of God* is finished."
- Rev 15:7: "And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the *wrath of God*, who lives forever and ever."
- Rev 16:1: "And I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, 'Go and pour out the seven bowls of the *wrath of God* into the earth.'"
- Rev 16:19: "And the great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of *His fierce wrath*."

- Rev 18:10: "...standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your *judgment* has come.'"

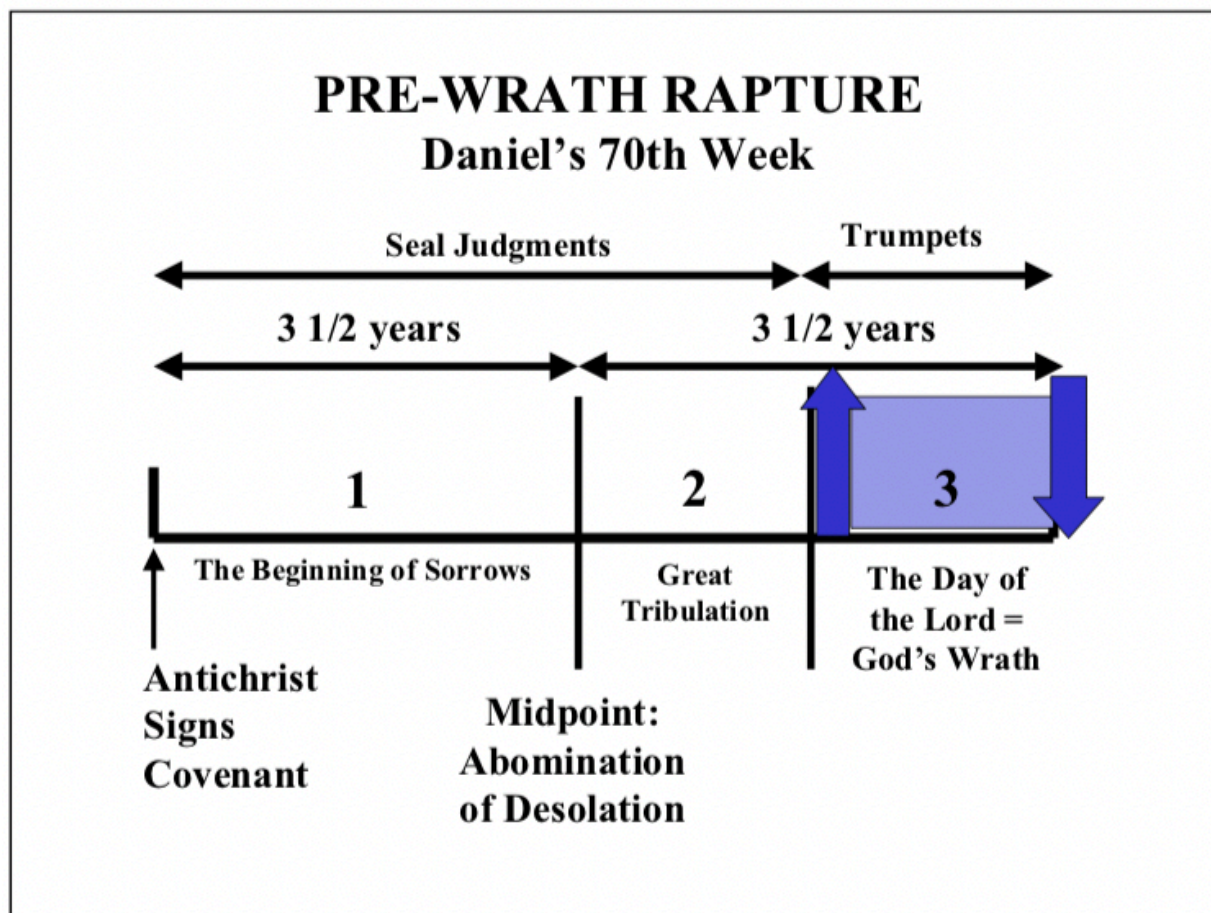
Sinful men will know that the worldwide judgments on the earth, seas, sun, and sky are coming from the hand of Almighty God Himself, and yet they will still not repent (Rev 6:16-17; 16:9-11). What a picture of the dark depravity of the human heart! God's wrath will be unlike anything the world has ever seen. And we are forced to ask the question—why would God leave His bride on earth during this time? It makes no sense.

As J.F. Strombeck asks, "One is forced to ask, how could the Lamb of God die and rise again to save the Church from wrath and then allow her to pass through the wrath that He shall pour upon those who reject Him? Such inconsistency might be possible in the thinking of men, but not in the acts of the Son of God."

Overview of the pre-Wrath View

The first 3-1/2 years of Daniel's 70th week are the beginning of sorrows but do not constitute any wrath of God, only the trials and tribulations of life. In fact, Rosenthal insists that the word "tribulation" is never used for the first half of Daniel's 70th Week.

- The term "Great Tribulation" applies to a second period of Daniel's 70th Week for which there is intense tribulation or persecution of Christians. This period lasts an indeterminate amount of time but less than 3-1/2 years. Most of the diagrams show it ending half way through the last 3-1/2 years of Daniel's 70th Week.
- The first six seals cover the time from the beginning of Daniel's 70th Week until the end of the Great Tribulation (roughly 5-1/4 years). In their entirety they constitute the wrath of man through Antichrist.
- The sixth seal marks the coming of cosmic signs that precede the trumpet judgments.
- The Lord raptures the Church at the end of the Great Tribulation.
- The Day of the Lord is the time of God's wrath that covers roughly the last half of the second 3-1/2 years of Daniel's 70th Week. This follows the Rapture. This time of wrath is God's anger poured out on all mankind including Israel and the nations.
- This time of God's wrath actually extends for thirty days after the end of Daniel's 70th Week as God's bowl judgments are poured out on the nations who persecuted Israel. This thirty days is based upon Daniel 12:11.



Those who believe in a pre-Wrath Rapture contend that the wrath of God is absent from the first six Seal judgments merely on the grounds that the actual word "wrath" is not found in the verses describing these judgments (v1-11). However, absence of a word does not prove absence of the concept. For example, the word *wrath* does not appear in the Genesis account of the Flood or Sodom and Gomorrah, yet God's wrath was obviously poured out during the Flood (Gen 6-8) and on Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19).

If the first six Seal judgments do not represent the wrath of God, then what exactly do they represent? According to pre-Wrath view, they represent the wrath of man and Satan rather than God's wrath. Yet, how can this be when Jesus is portrayed in heaven as opening the seven-sealed scroll (5:7; 6:1), which brings forth the various seal judgments, including the first five Seal judgments? If Jesus' opening of the Seals brings forth these judgments, then they simply cannot be categorized as the wrath of man and Satan and not the wrath of God. While it remains true that human activity is the cause of many of these first five Seal judgments, human activity alone is not their ultimate cause. The ultimate cause of these judgments is the Lamb's heavenly activity of opening the seven-sealed scroll. In addition,

the people speaking in v16-17 are the earth dwellers (unbelievers) so to believe that God's wrath begins at the 6th Seal is to believe unbelievers.

Look at what happens in Rev 6:

- 6:1-2 - Advent of the Antichrist - deceiving the world
- 6:3-4 - Global Warfare (World War 3?)
- 6:5-6 - Global Famine
- 6:7-8 - Widespread Death (25% of world's population)
- 6:9-11 - Martyrdoms
- 6:12-17 - Cosmic Disturbances

How can anyone with a straight face going to claim that the first 6 Seals are not the wrath of God? The pre-Wrath view says that it is Satan causing these things...utter nonsense! It is Jesus directing these judgments from heaven by unsealing the seven-sealed scroll. Jesus is in heaven directly affecting these events by breaking the seals. Even if Satan is causing some of the events in Revelation, we know that God uses Satan to accomplish His purposes (Cf. Job).

If pre-Wrath Rapture advocates believe that God's wrath begins with Seal 6, what do you call Seal judgments 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5? They say that's "tribulation" (*thlipsis*) not God's wrath (*orge*). However, these words mean the same thing, and are used that way (Rom 2:8-9):

Rom 2:8-9:

8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, **wrath** [*orgē*] and indignation.

9 *There will be* **tribulation** [*thlipsis*] and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek,

- Perfect example of the overlap between *orgē* and *thlipsis*

— When Paul describes the wrath of God, he will sometimes use *thlipsis* and sometimes use *orgē*

— Sometimes there is a semantic overlap between *orgē* and *thlipsis*. So just because "tribulation" is used, but not the word "wrath," that is no argument at all because frequently, those two words overlap.

— So Jesus is in heaven opening the seven-sealed scroll, which is bringing God's judgments to the earth, and sometimes those judgments are described with *thlipsis* and sometimes with *orgē*, but it's the same concept...God's judgment coming to the earth.

Wrath of God in Revelation

Rev 6:16: "...the *wrath* of the Lamb"

Rev 6:17: "...for the great day of Their *wrath* has come"

Rev 11:18: "...thy [God's] *wrath* is come"

Rev 14:10: "...he will also drink of the wine of the *wrath* of God"

Rev 14:19: "...and threw them into the great wine press of the *wrath* of God"

Rev 15:1: "...seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the *wrath* of God is finished"

Rev 15:7: "...seven golden bowls full of the *wrath* of God"

Rev 16:1: "Go and pour out the seven bowls of the *wrath* of God into the earth"

Rev 16:19: "...Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce *wrath*"

Rev 19:15: "...He treads the wine press of the fierce *wrath* of God"

Believers Not Appointed to God's Wrath

John 3:36: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Rom 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;"

Rom 2:5: "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;"

Rom 5:9: "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him."

1 Thess 1:10: "...and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come."

1 Thess 5:9: "For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."