

# Faith Pulpit

## Prewrath Rapturism and the Day of Lord in the Old Testament

Two previous Faith Pulpit articles have discussed the Prewrath Rapture View.<sup>1</sup> According to this position, the seventieth week of Daniel (Dan 9:24) is divided into three sections: man's wrath, which transpires from the beginning of the week until the middle of the week; Satan's wrath (the Great Tribulation), which transpires from the midpoint of the week until some unknown time in the second half; and the Day of the Lord, which transpires from the close of the Great Tribulation until the thirty days after the seventieth week.

This article and the one to follow will focus on the key tenet of the view, the timing of the Day of the Lord.<sup>2</sup> Paul states in 1 Thessalonians 5:9: "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." The wrath to which Paul is referring is the Day of the Lord (see v. 2). If Christians are not appointed unto the wrath of the Day of the Lord, then the implication is that they are removed prior to its beginning. The question then remains as to when the Day of the Lord begins. The starting time (*terminus a quo*) is a key issue in determining the timing of the rapture in relation to Daniel's seventieth week. The prewrath view affirms that the rapture occurs after the Great Tribulation, but on the same day that the Day of the Lord begins. The purpose of these two articles is to demonstrate that Prewrath Rapturism's starting time for the Day of the Lord is too late in the week. Instead, the Day of the Lord begins at the start of Daniel's seventieth week. If the beginning of the Day of the Lord coincides with the initiation of Daniel's seventieth week, then this interpretation adds a strong support for pretribulationism. This article will critique three key Old Testament passages in the debate, and the article to follow will highlight the New Testament passages.

### Joel 2–3

The main pre-wrath argument from Joel 2–3 involves the precursors to the Day of the Lord as described in 2:30, 31 and 3:15.<sup>3</sup> Advocates of the prewrath view assert that the Day of the Lord cannot begin until these conditions occur. In Joel 2:30, 31, the prophet describes heavenly portents and states that they will take place “before the great and terrible day of the LORD come[s].” Advocates of this view further argue that the description of the heavenly disturbances in the sixth seal (Rev 6:12–17) parallels these verses in Joel, i.e., that both passages describe the same event. Prewrath advocates then conclude that the sixth seal must occur before, not during, the Day of the Lord.

This argument is not as strong as it first appears. In Joel 2:1–11, the prophet describes the attack on Jerusalem by the King of the North. In verse 20, Joel points out the king’s defeat. This description parallels Daniel 11:36–45, which takes place near the midpoint of the seventieth week.<sup>4</sup> In Joel 2:10, 11, the prophet describes the period as the Great and Terrible Day of the LORD. This designation parallels Daniel’s description of the Great Tribulation, which encompasses the second half of the seventieth week (Dan 12:1, 7). Joel 2:12–27 discusses the establishment of the millennium (see especially verses 24–27). In verses 28–32, the prophet returns to his discussion of the Great and Terrible Day of the LORD, but does so in reverse order. In verses 28, 29, he describes events that will occur “afterward,” in other words, after the second half of the seventieth week but just before the millennium. In verses 30, 32, he describes events that will occur just “before” the second half of the week. The word before can refer to an event which is first in a series. For example, I could say in class, “Before we start class, let us pray.” The opening prayer precedes all of the events of the class hour but is still a part of that hour. The disturbances described in these verses take place in the middle of the seventieth week and initiate the second half, which is known as the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord. These verses return to the discussion of verses 1–10, the events at the middle of the week.

In Joel 3:14,15, the prophet discusses a different judgment from the one he was just considering. This judgment is universal (vv. 2, 9, 11, 12) and prepares the way for the millennium (v. 1). The description in verse 13 is similar to one in Revelation 16:14–20 and appears to describe the great battle that closes out the seventieth week, commonly known as the Battle of Armageddon. Verse 15 does describe a blackout of the sun, but this darkening is one that occurs at the end of the seventieth week. Zechariah 14:2–7 and Matthew 24:29 also describe the darkening of the sky at the same time. At the mid-point and again at the close of the seventieth week, God will darken the sky in connection with His judgment. In Joel 3:14, the prophet refers to the Day of the Lord being “near.” In Joel’s prophetic perspective, the day does appear to be near, even though history reveals that it has not yet occurred.

## **Isaiah 2**

Isaiah 2:12–21 also describes the Day of the Lord. In verse 17, Isaiah states that “the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day.” The Prewrath position is that only the Lord can be exalted in the Day of the Lord and not the Antichrist. Since the Antichrist is exalted during the Great Tribulation, Prewrath

rapturists believe that the Day of the Lord cannot begin before or during that time period.

The problem with the prewrath view is that verses 10–22 describe events that occur in the Day of the Lord. During this eschatological day, God will judge the world with a great earthquake and men will flee to the caves and hills for protection (vv. 19, 21). This judgment does not glorify the Antichrist. When God “shakes terribly the earth” (vv. 19, 21), He alone will be glorified. Only He can perform such works. This judgment does not mean that the Antichrist cannot receive some form of honor by men. As late as the first bowl judgment (Rev 9:20), which occurs near the end of the week, he is still worshipped. But this judgment means that true honor and glory point to the Lord. This prophecy further complicates the prewrath view because it parallels the events of the sixth seal (Rev 6:12–17). The prewrath interpretation of that seal judgment is that it occurs before the Day of the Lord. However, Isaiah 2:10–22 indicates that it occurs during the Day of the Lord. Isaiah 2:10–22, Revelation 6:12–17, and Joel 2:30–32 parallel each other and refer to events that occur at the middle of Daniel’s seventieth week, a time too early for the prewrath view.

### **Malachi 4:5–6**

Malachi 4:5 states, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.” The prewrath view asserts that Elijah must come prior to the start of the Day of the Lord, based on the word before. Advocates of this view believe that Elijah is one of the two witnesses of Revelation 11 and that he probably ministers in the second half of Daniel’s seventieth week.

It is noteworthy that Malachi sets the time for Elijah’s coming as preceding the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord. As noted earlier, this time period refers to the second half of Daniel’s seventieth week. If Elijah ministers in the first half of that week, he precedes the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord, just as Malachi predicts. If Elijah ministers in the second half of the week, the prewrath view is still answerable. The word before is the same word used in Joel 2:30. This word can refer to an event which is first in a series. The Prophet Elijah could begin his ministry in the second half of the week, and still be “before” that period by being the opening event. Whether Elijah ministers in the first half or the second half, his timing poses no problem for pretribulationism. However, because the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord refers to the entire second half of the seventieth week, the Day of the Lord must begin at least by the mid-point of the week. This truth disproves the starting time of the prewrath view.

The Old Testament data indicate that by the middle of the seventieth week, the Day of the Lord is in progress. This timing is too early for the prewrath view, which asserts that it begins some time in the second half. In light of these Old Testament passages, the prewrath view has incorrectly interpreted them and is incorrect. These findings should be applied to the New Testament passages, which is the

subject of the next article.

## Works Cited

1. See Manfred Kober, "Is Rosenthal Right About the Rapture?" Faith Pulpit, April 1991; Myron J. Houghton, "Pre-wrath Rapture: A Pretrib Evaluation," Faith Pulpit, February/March 1998.
2. For a full treatment of this issue, see Alan D. Cole, "A Critique of Prewrath Rapturism's Terminus A Quo of the Day of the Lord" (Th.D. diss., Central Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004).
3. See further, Alan D. Cole, "A Critique of the Prewrath Interpretation of the Day of the Lord in Joel 2-3," Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal 9 (2004): 33–55.
4. See Roy E. Beacham, "Joel 2, Eschatology of," Dictionary of Premillennialism, edited by Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 216–19.

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