

SPECIAL INTERLUDE: A PROPHECY TRILOGY FOR OUR ERA

Part I: God's Comforting Prophetic Timetable For Today's Believers

(Revelation 3:21-4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Two Church members have reported that due to the unsettling COVID-19 pandemic and recent election, views are circulating on the Internet that lead people they know to think and to act in unedifying ways. To address this need, we are taking an interlude in our trek through the Bible to give three sermons on relevant Bible prophecies.

Much of today's unrest rises from the dread many have that the current trials mean they may have entered the "Great Tribulation Period" predicted in Revelation 6:1-19:21, that they may have to face the "Antichrist" and his "mark of the beast." Thus, when evangelical Christian "MyPillow CEO Mike Lindell called the COVID-19 vaccine 'mark of the beast stuff' and threatened to sue Dominion Voting Systems for allegedly 'suppressing the truth' about election fraud" (Christina Zhao, "'Horrible': MyPillow CEO Mike Lindell Calls COVID-19 Vaccine 'Mark of the Beast Stuff,'" February 8, 2021; msn.com), even many evangelicals became upset! Then there are articles online like Stephanie Hertenberg's "4 Signs of the Antichrist" (belief.com) that claims, "The identity of the Antichrist has long been a source of debate and anxiety for Christians. Given that the stakes are nothing more or less than a person's eternal soul, a great deal is riding on successfully identifying the Antichrist." Such articles only fuel more anxiety!

The reason many fear that the Great Tribulation may be upon us comes from some views evangelicals have on the "rapture" of the Church: (1) Some hold to the Partial Rapture view, that Christ allegedly will take only spiritually worthy believers to heaven and leave the rest of the Church behind to be purified in the trials of the Great Tribulation. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, p. 1856) (2) Others hold to a Midtribulation Rapture position where the rapture allegedly occurs in the middle of the seven-year Great Tribulation Period so that Christians allegedly will still face the Antichrist for three-and-a-half years, *Ibid.* (3) Still others teach the Posttribulation Rapture belief, that we believers in Christ will go through the entire seven-year Great Tribulation with the rapture coming at the end of that time, *Ibid.*

Need: *So we ask, "Will we face the Antichrist and the 'mark of the beast'?! What, then, should we DO about it?!"*

- I. First of all, our CURRENT trials are part of a MINI-Great Tribulation that occurs in the final era of Church History BEFORE the rapture that in turn comes BEFORE the Great Tribulation, Rev. 3:21-4:3:**
- A. Christ Himself in Revelation 1:19 clarified that the Book of Revelation is arranged in three parts -- (1) the things John had "seen" in Revelation 1:1-20, (2) the things which "are," that is, the current era of Church History in Revelation 2:1-3:22, and (3) the things which shall be "hereafter" in Revelation 4:1-22:21, what occurs following the completion of the present era of Church History. (*Ibid.*, Ryrie, fn. to Revelation 1:19)
 - B. Thus, Revelation 4:1-4 where John in a vision is called to heaven with a voice like that of a trumpet and he is then instantly in heaven typifies the rapture as taught in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. The rapture thus marks the end the Church era and the start of the "hereafter" part of the Book of Revelation.
 - C. Since we have often taught that Revelation 3:21 predicts a "Mini-Great Tribulation" to occur in our time, the last era of Church History, this **Mini-Great Tribulation** occurs *before* the Revelation 4:1-4 rapture that in turn occurs *before* the Revelation 6:1 to 19:21 **Great Tribulation Period** with its Antichrist and mark of the beast!
 - D. On the **Mini-Great Tribulation** in our time, Revelation 3:21 predicted how Christ promised to grant the "overcomer(s)" in **our** time who overcome(s) worldliness like He did (John 16:33b) to sit with Him "*in*" His earthly throne as Christ overcame and sat with His Father "*in*" His heavenly throne. Revelation 7:17 in its context explains: Christ "*in the midst of*" His Father's throne will nurture oppressed believers who come out of the **Great Tribulation** by shepherding them, so the "overcomer(s)" of **our** time will sit with Christ "*in*" his earthly throne to nurture by Bible exposition oppressed believers in a **Mini-Great Tribulation**. The future **Great Tribulation** also involves oppression under Antichrist and natural disasters, so we explain our era:
 1. In the **Mini-Great Tribulation** of our time, Christ disciplines erring evangelicals, and we have long noted the errors of Amillennial reconstructionism and Marxism that many evangelicals believe and practice. We can readily see that **God** may be *letting* a questionable election "loss" occur to President Trump to block errant reconstructionists from setting up an American-Christian world empire and to *let* a Marxist-leaning administration "win" the election and so produce oppressive mandates, exposing the errors of Marxism!
 2. Add to this the COVID-19 pandemic and other natural disasters (fires, storms, etc.) that create tribulation-like hardships, we have reasonable explanations of why God is letting occur what has been occurring!
 3. The only solution is for people to trust in Christ for relief, and He can use His "overcomer(s)" to bring it!

- II. Therefore, we are *NOT* to let anyone deceive and upset us by claiming that our current trials are part of the future Great Tribulation with its revelation of the Antichrist and mark of the beast, 2 Thess. 2:1-3a!
- III. Indeed, that Great Tribulation Period, what the Apostle Paul called the "day of the Lord," will come *ONLY AFTER* the Holy Spirit's restraining ministry *ENDS* with the *RAPTURE*, 2 Thessalonians 2:3b-9:
- A. The Great Tribulation will not come unless there is a great apostasy with the appearing of the Antichrist who seats himself as God in the Jewish temple. (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11 and Matt. 24:15), 2 Thessalonians 2:3b-5.
 - B. Yet, there is a "Restrainer" mentioned in the Greek text in the **neuter** gender (2 Thess. 2:6; *to katechon*) and again *but* in the **masculine** gender in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 (*ho katechon*; U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 716; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 719) Who restrains the **revelation** of the **Antichrist**, and this One can **only** be the **Holy Spirit**: (1) the Greek word for "spirit" is neuter though the Holy Spirit as God is masculine, so Scripture writers at times referred to Him in the neuter gender in agreement with the gender of the Greek word "spirit" and at times in the masculine gender in focusing on the Spirit's divine Person, so Paul's shift in genders for the Restrainer perfectly fits a reference to the Holy Spirit! (Ibid.) (2) Also, only God is strong enough to restrain the Antichrist who will be empowered by Satan (2 Thess. 2:9), so the Holy Spirit fits that requirement, too.
 - C. The Holy Spirit's restraining ministry must then be removed at the rapture, for He seals true Christians and through the true Church ministers with a restraining influence on the progress of evil in the world, Ibid.
 - D. Thus the *rapture* must occur *BEFORE* the *revelation* of the *Antichrist* at the *start* of the *Great Tribulation!*
- IV. God will then bring the Great Tribulation on the world to punish its unbelievers by causing them to believe the strong lie that the Antichrist is the Messiah in order to condemn those who had rejected Christ's salvation Gospel during the previous era of Church History, 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12.
- V. However, God chose us believers in Christ unto the salvation of the body by the *PRETRIBULATION* rapture because we believed the true Gospel of Christ's salvation, 2 Thess. 2:13-14 with Rom. 8:23!
- VI. Consequently, we believers are to be comforted, to remain stable and to focus on serving the Lord, for our destiny is heaven away from this world of woe with its future Great Tribulation! (2 Thess. 2:15-17)

Lesson: *Our present trials as believers in Christ are of the Mini-Great Tribulation sort in the Church era, NOT of the future Great Tribulation Period that is God's judgment on a Christ-rejecting world. Thus, God will take us to heaven BEFORE the START of the Great Tribulation with its revelation of the Antichrist and mark of the beast.*

Application: (1) *May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life, John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.* (2) *Since believers in Christ will be taken to heaven before God's judgment falls on a Christ-rejecting world in the form of the Great Tribulation with its Antichrist and mark of the beast, may we believers take comfort in the hope of the Pretribulation Rapture, and, in stability, keep serving God.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

We answer the errant views on the rapture mentioned in our sermon introduction (as follows):

(1) On the Partial Rapture view, 2 Thessalonians 2:10 teaches that God's judgment of the Great Tribulation punishes the unsaved for not having believed the Gospel to be "saved," **not** to punish "unworthy" but saved, ungodly "carnal" believers! Also, 1 Thessalonians 5:10 claims that Christ died for us that whether we "wake" **OR** "sleep" -- the same Greek words being used in 1 Thessalonians 5:6 for spiritual alertness and lethargy -- we should live together with Him in escaping the time of God's wrath, 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 9. Thus, ungodly as well as godly believers in Christ are both taken to heaven in the rapture by the grace of God! (Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 706-707)

(2) On the Midtribulation Rapture view, those holding this view believe that only the last half of the Great Tribulation, its final three-and-a-half years, are the **real** tribulation when the Antichrist persecutes Israel and those coming to faith in Christ, Daniel 9:27b. However, 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 teaches that part of God's judgment is sending the lost world a strong delusion to believe in the Antichrist, and that can only occur when Antichrist appears to be peaceful in seducing the world by making his 7-year protective peace treaty with Israel at the start of the Great Tribulation Period. (Daniel 9:27a) Thus, the **entire 7-year Great Tribulation Period** is a time of *divine wrath*, so the Church must be raptured before it **all** begins, including **before** the **start** of the *first half* of the Great Tribulation!

(3) On the Posttribulation Rapture view, if the Great Tribulation is sent by God on a Christ-rejecting world, and no true believer is guilty of that sin, every true believer must be raptured before the start of the Great Tribulation!

May we trust in Christ Who died as our Atoning Sacrifice for sin that we might receive God's gift of eternal life. May we rest in Bible exposition to handle our current MINI-Great Tribulation, and in comfort and stability keep serving God, knowing we will be raptured *before* the start of the Great Tribulation Period.