

ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

PART 50

THE RAPTURE, PART 5

Finally, he [Dr. Hart] uses 1 Thessalonians 5:2 to claim Paul received his theology from the words of the Lord recorded in Matthew because he used the “thief in the night” wording to describe the sudden coming of the Lord catching people unawares.

1 Thessalonians 5:2 ²For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.

Dr. Hart's argument is the words “thief in the night” could only come from the Lord. But “thief” is a fairly obvious figure of speech and the Lord was using it to counsel the Jewish people to be ready for His coming. He was saying that His coming would be surreptitious and surprising, catching people unawares. Not only Paul but Peter used it in the New Testament. John quoted Jesus using the word “thief” in different contexts and he called Judas a thief. It cannot be a technical term. I searched to try and determine whether or not “thief in the night” or “coming like a thief” was a common Jewish idiom, but I couldn't verify that. But I did note that the word “thief” was used in figurative manner in the New Testament apart from the Olivet Discourse to refer to stealth in coming which is the context he is acknowledging. Dr. Hart notes this use of “thief in the night” is not used as an example in any Old Testament prophecy nor, he claims, is it found in any extrabiblical Jewish literature; therefore, he claims Paul could have only gotten it from the Lord's use of it in Matthew. It's a little hard to be dogmatic about that since we don't have access to all the literature of the time; it could have been more commonly used than he thinks it was. Using this phrase to place the Rapture in Matthew 24 absent supporting exegetical evidence simply isn't appropriate.

In part, Dr. Hart bases his reasoning on something that makes no sense. He says the Day of the Lord reference in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 is addressing “the imminent (pretribulational) coming of the day of the Lord” [John F. Hart, “Jesus and the Rapture: Matthew 24” in *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*, p. 64], but the Day of the Lord is not imminent. The Rapture is imminent. Apparently, he equates the Day of the Lord with the Rapture; therefore, in his mind, the same language used in Matthew 24 must be the Rapture. The day of the Lord is not the Rapture; it is the coming in judgment by the Lord at the Second Coming extending on in history throughout the Millennium. The day of Christ may be applied to the Rapture but not the Day of the Lord.

In both Matthew and 1 Thessalonians, the context is the Second Coming and the Day of the Lord, respectively. Both of these are Scriptures referring to something that happens after the Rapture. Using them to support the Rapture is to employ faulty exegesis; there are different things going on apart from the Rapture. One is the Day of

the Lord culminating in the Second Coming and one is the Rapture. 1 Thessalonians 5:2, referring to the Day of the Lord, cannot be used to support the presence of the Rapture in Matthew 24:43.

Fruchtenbaum made much of the fact the end of the Tribulation will be known because it will be exactly seven years after the covenant with Israel is signed. That will be true, but in terms of the Rapture, there are problems with that assertion as well. The people taken in judgment are unbelievers; they will have no knowledge about biblical issues and time periods because they won't know the Word of God and whatever they might hear from Tribulation believers, they most likely will reject. Biblical truth means nothing to them. Unbelievers always think they are the ones possessing wisdom and that believers are ignorant fools. These people have turned away from God and completely embraced the satanic world system and they will have no capacity to understand spiritual truth.

1 Corinthians 2:14 ¹⁴But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

Let's also not forget that even the heavens will be disturbed and it will be hard to keep track of time. People will be confused and disoriented. Time doesn't seem to be a factor in terms of unbelievers understanding what will be going on around them.

He also makes much of the point that the Rapture is a separation of believers from unbelievers, but this is not a solid foundation for finding the Rapture in the Olivet Discourse either. Again, it is true that the Rapture is a separation of believers from unbelievers, but separation works both ways and the end result is the same. In the Rapture, believers are taken to be with the Lord and separated from unbelievers. At the end of the Tribulation, unbelievers are taken for judgment and separated from believers. In terms of separation, the end result is the same: believers and unbelievers are separated one from the other. One group, believers, receives a glorified body and go into eternal life and the other group, unbelievers, experience judgment and eternal death. In the Rapture passages, it is the believers who are taken; in this Olivet Discourse judgment passage it is the unbelievers who are taken. Separation one from the other is simply separation no matter the direction from which it is viewed. Perhaps I'm missing something here, but I fail to see the distinction Fruchtenbaum is trying to make.

Fruchtenbaum refers to the admonition to watch (Luke 21:34-36) and he says this is equivalent to salvation. The word translated "keep on the alert" in the NASB is *αγρυπνέω* meaning to be alert, keep awake, be on guard, or be vigilant. It is having continuous and wakeful concern. He claims this means they can avoid the Tribulation by believing and being raptured. However, the context proves this to be a warning to the Jews who were already in the Tribulation. That means the opportunity to be raptured has passed and is no longer a possibility. The admonition to the Jews to be watchful in the Olivet

Discourse is to become believers during the Tribulation and therefore avoid the judgment at the end. Only believers, knowing His admonitions from the Scriptures, would be ready for His return; unbelievers will be oblivious to the spiritual realities of their situation. In the context of Luke, the Tribulation is underway just as it was in Matthew. He had just related the parable of the fig tree and all the trees. When the trees put forth leaves, the Tribulation will be in progress and that generation would live to see the end. By keeping on the alert, they could, in the end, escape judgment and stand before the Son of man.

Luke 21:34–36 ³⁴“Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap; ³⁵for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. ³⁶“But keep on the alert [ἀγρυπνέω, watch] at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape [ἐκφεύγω] all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Escape, ἐκφεύγω, means to become safe from danger by avoiding it or escaping from it. It also means to be aware of a peril and take measures to avoid it and that definition seems to fit this situation. The Jews are already in mortal danger during the Tribulation; the only escape will be to believe and be spared judgment.

Fruchtenbaum makes the point that believers in the Tribulation will not escape the things that will take place, which is partially true, but I think he is making some assumptions that are incorrect. His understanding of what it means to escape leads him into believing the context must be prior to the Tribulation and the Rapture is the subject. By means of the Rapture, Fruchtenbaum claims believers will escape all the problems accompanying the Tribulation. The problem with that is the context is already in the Tribulation time period and those who come to faith during that time, which is after the Rapture, are not promised an escape from it or out of it. The escape they will experience is from final judgment and not from the serious difficulties that will befall the world. Let's face it; if believers are in a building during the Tribulation that implodes due to an earthquake or some other Tribulation disaster, they will probably be killed alongside the unbelievers in the building. They will escape the Great White Throne judgment the unbelievers must experience, but they may very well lose their physical lives during some of the Tribulation judgments. Also, many Jewish believers will be martyred during the Tribulation. They are not promised an escape from death.

Matthew 24:9–10 ⁹“Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. ¹⁰“At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.

What these Jewish believers are promised is an escape from the final judgment. Jewish believers will experience the eternal life they obtained the moment they placed their faith in Christ Jesus. Paul presented the contrast with this truth in Luke with 1

Thessalonians 5:3 when he wrote that unbelievers will not escape the day of the Lord and the wrath that accompanies it. Tribulation believers escape; unbelievers do not escape.

1 Thessalonians 5:3 ³While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape [ἐκφεύγω].

Let's sum up what the Lord means when He says they will escape "all these things that are about to take place." First, remember that He is speaking to Jews during the Tribulation and not to Christians in general. The time context is during the Tribulation. The first thing the Jewish people will have to do to escape these things is to become believers. That instantly removes them from the wrath of God, even though they will experience the calamities associated with it to some extent, and it removes them from the judgment of God at the Great White Throne judgment. Even if they die in one of these judgments or are executed by the forces of Satan and Antichrist, they will escape the final judgment unbelievers will experience.

But there is another way Jewish believers may escape the judgments occurring during the Tribulation and that is by heeding the Lord's warning to flee Jerusalem when the abomination of desolation is set up in the Temple.

Matthew 24:15–16 ¹⁵"Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.

Those who heed the warning and flee will be divinely protected by God during the Great Tribulation in a place we believe will be Petra. In other words, these believers will be divinely protected from the disasters God will send on the world during the second half of the Tribulation. The escape the Lord was talking about is not an escape via Rapture from the Tribulation in total; it is an escape from final judgment and an escape to a place of divine protection. As we noted, many of them will die during the Tribulation but many will survive and a large number of them will find refuge and the divine protection to the end that God's divine protection will provide.

Revelation 12:6 ⁶Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

I noted that one element of the definition for ἐκφεύγω is to be aware of a peril and take measures to avoid it. That completely fits the context of the Lord's words in Luke 21:34–36 when He told the Jews to be "alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." They can escape if they heed the warnings by believing in Christ Jesus

and then by observing the conditions around them during the Great Tribulation fleeing to safety when the time comes. Then, at the end, they will stand before the Lord as believers and enter the Kingdom. While there is a temporal element to the concept of escaping the horrors of the Great Tribulation, there is also an eschatological element that Fruchtenbaum seems to have ignored. He seems to be relegating everything to physical, temporal safety which is too limiting in terms of the overall context. In either case, he puts the escape prior to the Tribulation in the form of the Rapture when the context of the Olivet Discourse is the Tribulation.

Fruchtenbaum considered the term “all those who dwell on the face of all the earth” during the Tribulation to be a term applicable to believers and unbelievers alike, but there is good reason to think “earth dwellers” is a biblical reference to unbelievers alone. Dr. Ice believes it is a technical term identifying unbelievers. “The eleven occurrences of “earth dwellers” in Revelation present an interesting composite. They are to be tested in order to show their true mettle (3:10), and they are identified as those who will persecute and kill believers during the Tribulation (6:10). Many of the judgments of the Tribulation are targeted for the “earth dwellers” (8:13). They will rejoice and send gifts to each other when the two witnesses are killed in Jerusalem (11:10). When the Beast (the Antichrist) is introduced in chapter 13, “all who dwell on the earth will worship him” (vv. 8, 12). Thus the earth dwellers (unbelievers) receive the mark of the beast and will spend eternity in the lake of fire. During the Tribulation the earth dwellers, as followers of the Beast, will be deceived by the false signs and wonders of the Beast and will erect an image of the Beast, thereby defiling the Jewish temple (13:14). Though an angelic messenger will preach the gospel to the earth dwellers (14:6), they will not follow the Lamb; instead they will be amazed at the Beast (17:8).” [Thomas D. Ice, “The Meaning of ‘Earth Dwellers’ in Revelation” in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166, no. 663 (July-Sept. 2009): 349, 350].

In addition to leading Israel to faith, the purpose of the Tribulation is to punish or test the earth dwellers.

Isaiah 26:21 ²¹For behold, the LORD is about to come out from His place To punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; And the earth will reveal her bloodshed And will no longer cover her slain.

Revelation 3:10 ¹⁰‘Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

“The phrase *those who dwell upon the earth* takes on a soteriological/eschatological meaning in the book of Revelation for it denotes the *unsaved at the time of the end who steadfastly continue in their rejection of God*. In contrast to the faithful who are *aliens and sojourners* upon the earth and whose hope is heavenward, these that dwell

upon the earth are trusting in man and his environment." [Tony Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, pp. 1:264-265].

Believers of every age have not been counted as residents of the earth but as strangers on earth whose true home is elsewhere. It is no different during the Tribulation.

Leviticus 25:23²³'The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me.

John 15:19¹⁹"If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.

Earth dwellers in Revelation:

1. 3:10 Purpose is to test them.
2. 6:10 They killed the saints; therefore, they deserve God's vengeance.
3. 8:13 Woe is pronounced on them.
4. 11:10 They rejoice over the death of the two prophets.
5. 13:8 They will worship the Antichrist.
6. 13:12 The false prophet leads them to worship the Antichrist.
7. 13:14 They are deceived and they will make an image to the beast.
8. 17:2 They will be made drunk with the wine of immorality.
9. 17:8 They will wonder over the beast.

There is nothing in these verses to suggest the term "earth dwellers" refers to believers and unbelievers alike; all of these Scriptures are clearly referring to unbelievers.

It is an error to suppose that "earth dwellers" in the book of Revelation refers to anyone other than unbelievers. Fruchtenbaum's position is that earth dwellers also refers to believers who must be raptured before the Tribulation in order to escape all these things the Lord taught in the Olivet Discourse and that is in error.

After I finished teaching the first part of this concept that the Rapture is in the Olivet Discourse, one of the men pointed something out I should have taught and didn't concerning the idea of normal life and the time of Noah. Both Dr. Hart and Dr. Fruchtenbaum use the concept of "normal" in the days of Noah as the basis for placing the Rapture in the Olivet Discourse. In addition to the problems with understanding what "normal" means in the context of the Tribulation, the concept is tied in with life at the time of Noah and that time was itself anything but normal. The concept of what was normal in Noah's day and what will be normal during the Tribulation cannot be equated with what is normal in this age as we know it. Obviously, the chaos characterizing the time before the Flood is different from the chaos that will characterize the Tribulation. The point is that both are times of tremendous upheaval

and destruction in one form or another and people will continue to try and live normal lives during those times. Both periods of time end in judgment for unbelievers.

Genesis 6:5⁵Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

In Fruchtenbaum's commentary on Genesis, he writes that sin was pervasive throughout the world in the years leading up to the Flood. [Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis: Exposition from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*, p. 153]. The world must have been characterized by lawlessness and violence, but people were still trying to live normal lives even in that time. The same will be true during the Tribulation; people will be trying to live normal lives, whatever that is at the time, even to the end of the Tribulation.

When the context of the entire book of Matthew is considered alongside the specific context of the Olivet Discourse, the doctrine of the Rapture in these verses becomes entirely untenable. This Scripture deals with the Second Coming of Christ. At His coming, unbelievers will be taken in judgment and believers will be left to enter the Kingdom.

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