

Flee the Wrath to Come

Revelation 8:1-5

*“Behold a whirlwind of the Lord has gone forth in fury – A violent whirlwind! It will fall violently on the head of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not turn back until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart. **In the latter days you will understand it perfectly.**” - Jeremiah 23:19,20*

Colossians 4:25 says, "But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality." In terms of the impending wrath of God, a.k.a. the Tribulation, are you doing right or wrong in your preparations for this irreversible event (Matthew 24:6)? Are you now in the process of fleeing? Or are you expecting that it will all "pan out," "not come in your life time," or worse yet – "will not happen at all?!" In speaking to **Christians** in Romans 2, Paul wrote: "in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart **you are treasuring up for yourself** wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (verse 5); "*tribulation and anguish, **on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek***" (verse 9). Failure to prepare for the coming of the Lord can have disastrous results (Matthew 25:11-13) - born again or not! Even the Bride herself had to "make herself ready." (Rev. 19:7, 1 John 3:3).

*“Therefore my beloved, as you have always obeyed...
work out your own salvation in fear and trembling.”*

– Philippians 2:12

My prayer is twofold: 1) that believers today realize their need to prepare, and 2) those that believe they need to prepare will actually do so. And let me hasten to add that the preparation needed IS NOT of a physical nature, it is spiritual as revealed by the virgins of Matthew 25.

Judgment and wrath are mentioned in Romans 2:5 above. The judgment of God always precedes the wrath of God. Because it is not His desire that any perish, He chastises, reproves and even scourges those that are His in order to correct them (Hebrews 12:5-13). Should the object of His judgment refuse to repent, then the wrath of God, designed for destruction, will follow. Believers must judge themselves or they will be judged by God (1 Corinthians 11:31,32). Peter wrote that "judgment begins at the house of God." It is not a foreign concept that blood-bought believers might be subject to the judgment of God. His judgment comes as a result of our own willfulness, rebellion or refusal to hear (Hebrews 12:25). Many, if not most Christians today are about to experience the judgment of God because of their lack of concern and/or unwillingness to note the signs of the end. Jesus said in Luke 21:34ff that the Day would come like a snare **upon all who are preoccupied with the cares (affairs) of this life**. The title of this message is *Flee the Wrath to Come*. What you must understand is that your "fleeing" MUST BE HAPPENING NOW. Are you "coming out from among them," "watching for His return," and "loving not the world?" If you are not, you most

certainly will taste the initial stages of the coming time of trouble.

The Tribulation Week consists primarily of God's wrath; however, it's initial stages (the first year roughly) contain only His judgment. This is understood by noting that the wrath of God is not mentioned until the sixth seal (Revelation 6:16,17) and poured out in the seventh seal (Revelation 8:1f).

Although believers (if they don't apostatize under the pressures of Antichrist) are promised rescue from that hour (1 Thessalonians 1:10), we are not promised deliverance from the "judgment" of God (1 Peter 4:17). My concern and question is: "Are you fleeing now so that you will be rescued then?"

The World: A Christian's Arch Enemy

Perhaps the most certain means of avoiding the wrath to come is to forsake the world now. Did you know that Galatians 1:4 says that Jesus died to save us from the world? We often say that He died to save us from sin and from hell, but how often have you realized that He died to deliver us from this present evil age? There is a great deception here because much of the Body of Christ cannot be differentiated from the world; indicating that many Christians willingly and perhaps unknowingly, participate in and identify with the world. THIS IS WRONG - not to mention very dangerous! Just ask Lot's wife. Jesus said, "Remember Lot's wife." Why? Because He wants every born again believer to understand that he/she must separate himself from the world. I don't mean live on a mountaintop and not associate with the people of the world. Jesus did not pray that we should be taken out of the world; rather that we should not be part of it, spiritually speaking. We must stand opposed

to the world's ways and systems while at the same time mingling with the people of the world so that some might be saved. Is your mingling for their sake or for your sake?

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

- 1 John 2:15-17

"Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

- James 4:4

My purpose for emphasizing this spiritual truth is because I believe that the world (whose ruler is an undercover master, a double agent if you will) is the single most likely reason to keep Christians on the earth at the time of the Firstfruits Rapture. You must take a stand against the world today if you hope and expect to be removed from it, physically, in the very near future.

The Firstfruits Rapture Explained

What is this "Firstfruits Rapture" you speak of anyway? It is a simple concept and the only one that any honest individual can find adequate scriptural support for. It is the "prize" that Paul referred to in Philippians 3:14;

the "reward" of Hebrews 11:5,6 and the "rescue" described in Revelation 3:10. Since it is a prize, a reward - it follows that not everyone will obtain it. To obtain a prize you must first understand that there is one and then you must learn how to obtain it. Finally, you must actually do what is necessary to win the prize. Sadly, most Christians don't even know (or refuse to believe) that such a prize exists. The majority of Christians have been told either "we're all going anyway," or "we have to go through it." Neither of these suppositions have a scriptural basis, unless you are willing to accept isolated passages taken out of context. There are those among us who would lull the flock to sleep by alleging that ALL Christians will automatically go in the pre-trib rapture. This is reminiscent of Jeremiah 23:21,22: *"I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear my words, then they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings."* Real, born again Christians today are being corrupted by false teachers which wink at carnality and worldliness, while promising peace and safety that do not exist. No sin, carnality or worldliness can sever us from eternal life in Jesus Christ, because He paid that debt on Calvary. HOWEVER, being delivered from the Great Tribulation in the last days is as much dependent on the individual believer's walk as it is the finished work of Christ.

PARALAMBANO

Matthew 24:39-44 in describing the pre-trib rapture, states that one shall be taken and the other left. Verse 39 describes a negative taking, using the word "AIRO". However, upon reaching verse 40, Jesus switches the negative "airo" to the positive word for taken which is "paralambano": *"Then two men*

will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left.” This is the same word that is used in John 14:3, *“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you (paralambano) unto Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”* Translated to English, Paralambano means “to welcome and/or receive into fellowship (intimate)”, or “called to one side in an affectionate manner”. Matthew 24:39 shows Noah’s scoffers being taken away (AIRO) to the judgment of the Great Flood. Matthew 24:40 shows one being called up to Jesus in the rapture and another being left behind in the Tribulation. Two completely different events. Some attempt to scuttle the entire Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24 and 25) by saying it applies to Jews only. Would Jesus really describe the Rapture and not have gentile believers also in view?! I think not. Especially since He gives no less than three parables describing readiness after verse 40: “the Faithful Servant,” “the Wise and Foolish Virgins” and “the parable of the Talents”, ALL of which obviously pertain to born again believers, both Jew and Gentile.

To understand the Firstfruits Rapture, you must first understand the two resurrections. Jesus referred to them in John 5:28,29 and Revelation 20:5,6. The first resurrection involves all of the redeemed of all time; only the lost will appear at the second resurrection, which is also called the Great White Throne Judgment of God, described in Revelation 21:11-15. The first resurrection spans a 2,000-year period. It started with the resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:20 and will be complete at the end of the Tribulation Week (Revelation 20:5). The first resurrection, in accord with 1 Corinthians 15:23, has several stages:

1. The resurrection/rapture of Christ (1 Cor 15:20, Acts 1:10)

2. Resurrection/rapture of the O.T. saints (Mat 27:53, Eph 4:8)
3. Resurrection/rapture of the N.T. saints (1 Cor 15:50f, 1 Thes.. 4:13-17)
4. Main harvest rapture of Trib saints (Rev 7:13f)
5. Rapture of the 144,000 Jews (Rev 12:5; 14:1-5)
6. Resurrection/rapture of the 2 witnesses (Rev 11:12)
7. Resurrection of the Tribulation martyrs (Rev 20:4)

The Firstfruits Rapture, as noted above, is the third stage of the first resurrection and, as stated, is a prize to be won. This particular prize will rescue (Revelation 3:10) the recipient from the "hour of trial" (Tribulation Week). To win the prize, one must of course be born again, i.e., born of the Spirit. But that IS NOT the only criteria, as so many teach today. If it were the only criteria, there would be some specific scripture to support that premise.¹ There is just one criteria required to escape Hell and the Lake of Fire: belief and acceptance in the atoning work of Jesus Christ – nothing more is required of the believer in Christ. But deliverance from the Tribulation Week is much different than salvation from an eternity in hell and it must be understood in a different light by applying the salient scriptures. There are numerous passages of Scripture that define the criteria for being in the Pre-tribulation Rapture:

Criteria for Firstfruits Rapture

1. A believer must pursue *holiness* (1 John 3:3, Heb 12:14)
2. A believer must be willing to *suffer* (Rom 8:17)
3. A believer must *watch* for His return (Rev 3:2,3)
4. Belief in the Pre-trib Rapture (Heb 3:19; 11:5,6)

5. We must hold to sound *doctrine* (1 Tim 4:16, 2 John 8)

It is obvious that most Christians fall far short in one or more of the above categories. Therefore, as Matthew 7:14 confirms, only a few will be "kept from the hour." My earnest prayer to God and plea is that you re-order your priorities in light of the foregoing criteria. Otherwise, your experience will be the same as God's people in the Old Testament:

*"Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion...I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest.' Beware brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief...for who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest **any of you** seem to have come short of it."*

- Hebrews 3:7-4:1

The wrath of God is coming soon to this earth. As a Christian, you must be pursuing the reward - which is rescue from that hour. If you make light of it (2 Peter 3:3,4), you will be left behind (Matthew 24:45-51). Of the entire righteous line of Seth, Enoch alone was raptured to heaven without seeing death (Hebrews 11:5,6). The writer of Hebrews referred to this as Enoch's "reward." God rewarded Enoch for his faith for translation, not merely His faith in God. Had saving faith in God been the only criteria, Enoch's ancestors

would have also been taken. They were all alive on the earth at the same time. Genesis 5:1-24 reveals that the patriarchs from Adam to Enoch, all seven (Jude 14), were alive together. Those seven were: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Cainan, Mahalalel, Jared and Enoch. Since they were all of the righteous line of Adam, i.e., Abel versus Cain, why were they not all taken? Why was Enoch alone found to "please God." Perhaps it was because, as Jude said, "Enoch prophesied '*Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints...*'" Yes, Enoch prophesied of the second coming of Christ 3,000 years before His first coming! Are you proclaiming the coming of the Lord? Is that a criteria for receiving the reward of the Firstfruits Rapture?

"By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, 'and was not found, because God had taken him'; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

- Hebrews 11:5,6

Like the Israelites in the wilderness, Enoch's personal experience depended on what he did or did not *believe*. The Israelites, as depicted in Hebrews 3 and 4, were destroyed because they did not believe that God would take them into the promised land. Make careful note that although they believed *in God*, they did not believe what God told them. So we see that the "faith" of Enoch that is mentioned in Hebrews 11:5, **was not** "saving faith," but faith that God would "take him!" Do you believe that God will take us before the judgment? If not, then you won't be taken. Enoch *pleased* God, not so much because of his belief *in* God, but because he simply "believed God" (in

regard to what He said he would do). When we believe and obey, God is pleased. Enoch had a walk that was pleasing to God (Colossians 2:6) because: 1) he longed to be in heaven and prophesied of the second coming of Christ, and 2) Enoch **believed** God would take him alive into heaven before the judgment fell. As a result, Enoch received the *reward* of rapture.

Notice that Enoch was not much interested in the things of the world, i.e., taking the country back for God, praying that "revival" would change the moral climate of the nation or trying to establish the kingdom of God on earth. All of these concerns and efforts, though apparently praiseworthy, are unbiblical and earthly-minded. 2 Timothy 2:4 tells us that a good soldier of Jesus Christ **does not** entangle himself in the affairs of this life. Holding cares for this life (Luke 21:34f), is to be worldly or carnally minded - regardless of how good your intentions might be! Colossians 3:1,2 unequivocally states that we must turn our attention away from the things of this earth (political affairs, cultural morality, etc.) and set our minds on heaven - by looking for the appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-13). To be carnally minded is to *displease* God (Romans 8:6-8). Because Enoch was not carnally-minded, but rather heavenly-minded, he **pleased** God, so much so that God took him out of this world. Do you desire to leave this world?

Another characteristic that found favor with God, was Enoch's willingness to expose false teachers and false doctrine. Too many high profile ministers today are abrogating their ministerial responsibility for the sake of man-made "love and unity." Several contemporary Christian leaders have (and are) safeguarding their "ministries" by not naming those who are presently shipwrecking the Faith of the Gospel. Jude said we must "earnestly

contend for the faith" and reminded us that Enoch was such a "defender," another reason that God took him. Will those who are "petting the wolves" be left behind for safeguarding their ministries in lieu of safeguarding the flock? *"For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men...Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men..."* (Jude 4,14). Oh yes, Enoch had a discernment ministry, in addition to his prophetic ministry! This combination resulted in his reward of removal. His life and ministry should be our example. We do well to model him and thus escape the wrath to come.

Three Alternatives

Should you not imitate Enoch, you will be left behind (like the children of Israel in Hebrews 3 and 4). As a result, you will then face three alternatives: death, apostasy or delayed rapture.

The first, death, is depicted in Revelation 6:9-11. Here we are told that those who are martyred **during the Tribulation Week** (not before) must remain in their graves ("under the altar") until all Tribulation saints are killed. That does not occur until the end of the Tribulation (Revelation 20:4). At the close of the Tribulation Week, all of the Tribulation martyrs will be raised incorruptible in the final stage of the first resurrection (Revelation 20:4-6). Revelation 6 begins the Tribulation with the Antichrist confirming a covenant (the word for "bow" in the white horse rider's hand actually means "covenant, confirm"). The events of Revelation 6 transpire within the first of the seven years. Christians will immediately begin to be martyred by Mystery Babylon

the Great (the unified false church of Revelation 17). If you are left behind, you will most likely be killed, unless you apostatize by joining the one world church which is now being formed. Those that are presently accepting ecumenism (including Islam) will one day accept what the Bible terms, "the mark of the beast," although it certainly won't be described in such crass apocalyptic terms. Those that receive the "mark," will be highly esteemed, bearing an insignia of great honor and respect. It will identify the recipient as an enlightened, tolerant individual, magnanimous in his/her world view. Such individuals will be awarded the right to conduct business and to buy and sell freely, while all others will be despised and eventually eliminated.

*"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone **according to his work.**"*

- Revelation 22:12

*"Each one's **work** will become manifest; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's **work**, of what sort it is. If anyone's **work** which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward."*

- 1 Corinthians 3:13,14

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- i. 1 Corinthians 15:51 is often cited as the proof text for the inclusive Pre-tribulation Rapture. The verse, however, is not teaching that every Christian alive on the earth will be raptured; rather Paul's point, as seen in the surrounding context, is that both the living and the dead will be changed. The Bible, in many other places, gives particulars as to who among the living will be changed.

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