Day of the Lord Precursors?

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The term "The Day of the Lord" (hereafter designated by DOL) and its many variations play a significant and vital part in the events of eschatology. There are many prophetic passages speaking of the end times which involve some concept of DOL. Given the many schools of thought and interpretation in eschatology, there has been much confusion and debate over the meaning of this term and how it relates to the events of the last days.[1]

It is no surprise that DOL plays a significant role in the current debate on the rapture question which has been initiated by the publication of *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* by Marvin Rosenthal. In his book Rosenthal claims that "DOL is one of the most important truths to comprehend if the full-orbed scheme of end-time events is to be understood."[2] He goes on to state that "It is one of the most important terms to understand in a discussion of prophetic truth."[3]

Those who have opposed Rosenthal's pre-wrath rapture view agree with his assessment of the important role of DOL. Paul Karleen ably refutes claims by Rosenthal that there are no blessings associated with DOL, thereby proving that DOL extends in some sense to the end of the millennium.[4] Both Karleen and Renald Showers refute Rosenthal's claim the DOL begins with the 7th seal and his rapture position -- giving evidence that DOL begins with the 70th week of Daniel and includes the first four seals of Revelation.[5]

Since DOL has been shown to begin with the 70th week of Daniel, then how does a pre-tribulational rapture position explain Rosenthal's claim that there are two scriptural events which must precede DOL: cosmic disturbances in Joel 2:31[6] and the coming of Elijah[7] in Malachi 4:4-5? These two claims need to be reconciled with the pre-tribulational rapture position; for if these two events precede DOL, as Rosenthal understands that term, then (as he says) the

doctrine of imminence, "a major pillar of pre-tribulationism is untenable."[8]

The purpose of this article is to examine these claims and to show how they can be reconciled with a pre-tribulational rapture. To do this each of the claims will be presented as Rosenthal states them, evaluated as to their scriptural accuracy, and then a solution will be offered which adequately reconciles these two events into a pre-tribulational system of interpretation.

Cosmic Disturbance: Joel 2:31

Presentation of the Pre-Wrath View

Rosenthal claims that the cosmic disturbance preceding DOL "occurs inside of the tribulation period with the opening of the 6th seal." He further claims that six passages of Scripture (Isa. 13:10; Ezek. 32:7-8; Joel 2:31; Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:24-5; Luke 21:25) "converge in language, thought and common ground at the 6th seal," proving that there will be cosmic disturbances before DOL begins.[9] In addition, he claims that the appearing of the Son of Man in heaven will occur following the opening of the 6th seal and that this appearance of Christ is related to the rapture of the church *before* the Day of the Lord's wrath begins.[10]

Evaluation of the Pre-Wrath View

The claim by Rosenthal that the cosmic disturbances, indicated by the six Scripture references, converge at the 6th seal before DOL begins is false. It is false because there is scriptural evidence clearly indicating that the passage in Joel (which is the link holding together Rosenthal's claim that cosmic disturbances precede his DOL) does not occur at the 6th seal. If it can be proven that Joel's DOL does not occur at the 6th seal, then his theory that DOL begins after the 6th seal is flawed. Further, since the other cosmic disturbances described in the five remaining verses give no time indicator in reference to DOL, then the pre-tribulational doctrine of imminence is preserved. The cosmic disturbances in Isaiah and the synoptics (the Ezekiel passage probably does not refer to an eschatological DOL[11]) can occur any time within the 70th week of Daniel, which fits into the pre-tribulational claim that the 70th week of Daniel parallels DOL.

A close examination of the Joel passage will indicate some important truths relating to the time in view. First, the context surrounding Joel 2:31 indicates that these cosmic disturbances do not occur at the 6th seal. In the preceding context, Joel 2:26 states that the disturbances occur at a time when "my people shall never be ashamed" and at a time when God will be in the midst of Israel (2:27). This clearly will not occur until the time of the millennium (Ezek. 34:25-31; Joel 4:17). Verses 28-29, which also precede the cosmic disturbances, also tell of a future time when God's Spirit will be poured out on all flesh (in context this is Israel). Again, this is not what happens at the 6th seal but must occur at the end of the 70th week of Daniel when all of Israel is saved and given God's Spirit (Zech. 12:10; Rom. 11:26; Ezek. 36:24-28), and when they are restored to the land in belief.

The immediately following context declares that all nations will be gathered together in the valley of Jehoshaphat for judgment (see 3:2), a clear reference to the final battle of Armageddon, which occurs with the 6th bowl (Rev. 16:14), not the 6th seal. Showers rightly claims (in regard to this time frame) that "the 6th seal passage says nothing about the gathering of the nations' armies or the restoration of the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem."[12]

These facts indicate a serious flaw in DOL view of Rosenthal. In his zeal to destroy the immanency of the pre-tribulational rapture position, he has used a text of Scripture which also places his own pre-wrath position in a similar strait of having to explain how Joel's DOL fits within his DOL framework. For, if the Isaiah and synoptic passages converge on the 6th seal, which immediately precedes DOL wrath, then what is to be said for Joel's DOL? Are there then two DOL's in his scheme of DOL interpretation? And if the rapture occurs on the very same day as DOL begins,[13] then does the rapture still occur at the 6th seal, or does it now occur at the end of the 70th week, as indicated in Joel? Since Joel is the only passage which gives a definite time frame for the cosmic events in relation to DOL; and since Rosenthal places so much emphasis on cosmic disturbances immediately preceding DOL and the rapture, he would then have to place the rapture and DOL at the end of the 70th week; thereby changing his pre-wrath position to a post-tribulational position. An understanding of the biblical view of DOL, presented in the next section, would have prevented Rosenthal from such error and confusion and is incompatible with the pre-tribulational rapture position.

Reconciliation with a Pre-Tribulational View

As was seen above, it is clear that the Joel passage refers to an event called DOL, which is preceded by cosmic disturbances and occurs at the close of the 70th week of Daniel. Further, it was also shown that Rosenthal claims another event called DOL, which is preceded by other cosmic events, occurs sometime around the 6th seal. Rosenthal has inadvertently revealed a great truth about Scripture's use of DOL -- the fact that DOL can refer to different events at different times in an eschatological time frame. As one looks at the Old Testament passages, prophecies related to DOL were fulfilled in a number of ways, whether in the immediate future of the prophet or in the ultimate eschatological consummation. Thus DOL "is not a technical term in the sense that it always refers only to one event in God's plan."[14] It can refer to many different events, depending on the intent of the author and the context of the passage. In regard to this, Showers correctly states:

> The expression DOL refers to several special interventions of God into history at different times. . . The purpose of the DOL interventions is the accomplishment of God's purposes in history, which involves the demonstration of His sovereign rule over the earth and universe. Sometimes DOL refers to God's special intervention to bring judgment. Sometimes it refers to His special intervention to bring blessing. Sometimes is refers to one specific intervention involving one specific historical event . . . Sometimes. . . to an extended, concentrated series of interventions over a long period of time; it is used for all His interventions which start at the beginning of the 70th week of Daniel 9 and continue through the entire 70th week, the second coming of Christ, the millennium, and the destruction of the present heavens and earth at the end of history.[15]

Since the term DOL applies to more than one event and moment of the end times,[16] then the cosmic disturbances which occur before Joel's DOL have no bearing on a pre-tribulational rapture. Joel's DOL refers to a later time frame in the extended, concentrated series of interventions which start at the beginning of the 70th week and continue to the eternal state. For Joel DOL was one of judgment on the nations and blessing for Israel. Cosmic disturbances would occur before the time of his specific DOL events. This does not mean, as Rosenthal claims, that cosmic disturbances must occur before that

extended period of DOL, which begins at the 70th week. Therefore, cosmic disturbances are not a prophesied event which destroys the pre-tribulational doctrine of immanence.

Rosenthal's failure to see DOL in its true biblical light as specific events of judgment and/or blessing *as well as* an extended intervention by God over a lengthy period of time, has resulted in a misplacing of the rapture at the 6th seal. If, as even he claims, the rapture occurs before DOL, the rapture is pre-tribulational; for it has been clearly shown by Showers that the extended period of DOL begins with the 70th week of Daniel.

Second Coming of Elijah: Malachi 4:5

Presentation of the Pre-Wrath View

In the beginning of his chapter entitled, "Elijah Must Appear First," Rosenthal makes the bold claim that the biblical evidence that DOL begins with the opening of the 7th seal will increase and that the arguments he will present "collectively. . . will be impregnable."[17]

He makes two claims regarding the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3-19. First, he agrees with the claim that Elijah will be one of the witnesses.[18] Second, he agrees that the ministry of the two witnesses will be during the last half of the 70th week.[19] He further states that this presents an unsolvable problem for imminence: If Elijah appears before the 70th week, which pre-tribulationalist say begins DOL, then this is a prophesied event before the 70th week; and the doctrine of imminence is destroyed.[20]

Evaluation of the Pre-Wrath View

It should be noted first of all that Elijah is never mentioned in Revelation 11 as one of the two witnesses. This is an assumption by Rosenthal. Further, Revelation 11:3 places the witnesses between the 6th and 7th trumpets, after Rosenthal's rapture and start of DOL,[21] revealing another flaw in his system.

Second, a closer look at the context of Malachi 4:5, as well as 3:1, which may also describe the ministry of Elijah, will reveal that his ministry occurs at the end of the 70th week of Daniel; and therefore, by implication, so does DOL described by Malachi.

In Malachi 4:5 Elijah would come before the great and dreadful DOL. In verse 6 the result of his ministry is stated: "He shall turn

the hearts of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to the father." It is clear from Matthew 10:34-36 that this did not occur during the ministry of John the Baptist, who came in the spirit and power of Elijah.[22] A close look at 3:2-4 reveals the cleansing which must occur before this restoration takes place. These events also have not occurred in their true prophetic sense. Verse 2 speaks of the coming of the Lord to purge dross and iniquity from Israel.[23] Verse 3 states that the sons of Levi will be purified; the result is that the offering of Judah will be pleasing to God (3-4). From these verses it is clear that the events associated with the ministry of Elijah refer to a time when millennial sacrifices will be offered and Christ will be present. Feinberg concurs with this, stating this "refers to millennial conditions when He will have returned and have set up His righteous Kingdom on the earth."[24] The purification of Israel and Levi (3:1-4) and the turning of Israel back to God (4:6) do not occur at the time of the 7th seal. These events take place *after* the deliverance of Israel from all their enemies and immediately before the reign of Messiah (see Zech. 12:9-14). In addition, there is no mention in Revelation 11 that any of these works associated with Elijah would be performed by the two witnesses.

Reconciliation With a Pre-Tribulational View

It is clear that once again Rosenthal's view of DOL has resulted in a flaw in his position and a futile attack on the pre-tribulational rapture. Kaiser explains his view of DOL in Malachi in terms similar to Showers when he states:

> The basic concept then is that Malachi's prophecy does not merely anticipate that climactic fulfillment of the second advent; but it simultaneously embraces a series of events which all participate in the prophet's single meaning, even though the referents embraced in that single meaning are many... the whole set of events make up *one* collective totality and constitute only one idea, even though they involve many referents which are spread over a large portion of history.[25]

Pentecost gives a similar explanation of the DOL events in Malachi. He states:

> It is true Elijah will come before the coming of the great and dreadful DOL. It should, however, be noted that DOL may refer

> either to the entire period encompassed by that phrase; that is, from the beginning of the 70th week of Daniel through the millennial age; or it may refer to any of the events of that period under that name. . . This (coming of Elijah) could have reference to his appearance before the awful judgments descend just prior to and in connection with the second advent, which is an event of DOL. . .[26]

It is interesting that Rosenthal is familiar with this view of Pentecost; yet he rejects it, claiming it is "without biblical merit and contrary to the clear biblical teaching of a comprehensive, singular, eschatological DOL."[27] Yet, it was shown above that there are two clear periods called by DOL in Rosenthal's system. It is clear that the Bible does teach a comprehensive, singular eschatological DOL; but it also is made up of many events which are referred to by specific biblical writers as also comprising DOL. Richard Mayhue adequately sums up the biblical view of DOL when he says that DOL is not bound to a definite time duration, since it could last hours or days; and that "only context can determine DOL longevity, and even then only general approximation can be made."[28]

Another Difference

One final point needs to be addressed. In answer to some pre-tribulationalist claims that there could be a separation in time between the rapture and the beginning of the 70th week of Daniel, which would allow for a coming of Elijah and cosmic disturbances, Rosenthal offers four arguments to refute this idea. First, he claims this time interval is an assumption. Second, he claims that the cosmic disturbances are "clearly" revealed to begin with the 6th seal. Third, Elijah is to minister precisely 3 1/2 years making any time interval too short to accommodate his ministry occurring between the rapture and the making of a covenant with the antichrist. Fourth, he claims Scripture has been cited to demonstrate that the rapture and DOL have no significant period of time between them.[29]

In answer to his first claim, the time interval is an assumption which is based on previous biblical evidence of gaps in time between important periods in the Bible. For example, there will be a time gap of 75 days between the end of the tribulation and the beginning of the millennium. Also, there was a gap between the end of the dispensation of Law (the cross and veil renting) and the beginning of the Church at Pentecost.

In response to his second point, since there have been and will be dramatic disturbances of the heavenly bodies during the course of world history (see Amos 8:7-9; Ezek. 32:7, 11-15; Isa. 13:1-5, 10, 17, 22; Luke 23:44-45; Rev. 6:12-13, 9:1-2, 16:8-9),[30] why can't there be one which occurs right after the rapture and before the 70th week?

Regarding his third point, it is a great assumption to connect Elijah with the 3 1/2 year ministry of the witnesses. The biblical Elijah to come could start his ministry after the rapture and minister to the end of the 70th week of Daniel, since he is not restricted to 3 1/2 years of ministering which is indicated if he is one of the witnesses; or he could come at any time before the end of the 70th week. He would fulfill the prophecy of Malachi 4:5 in that he would come before the Malachi DOL and would be present to minister the way the Bible describes.

In answer to his last claim, the "scriptural proof" Rosenthal offers to demonstrate no significant time period between the rapture and DOL has been challenged by Karleen.[31] Not only does Rosenthal apparently fail to accurately describe the events of Noah and the flood regarding the time between the entrance into the ark and the flood, he also fails to properly discern the main point of the analogy: sudden judgment at the second coming of Christ, not a same day rapture and beginning of DOL.

It is clear from the above that there can be a time gap between the rapture and DOL, which *also* would adequately explain the cosmic disturbances *and* the coming Elijah within a dispensational pre-tribulational rapture time frame.

Conclusion

The claims by Rosenthal that a pre-tribulational rapture position fails to incorporate two scriptural events which must precede DOL, cosmic disturbances and the coming of Elijah, has been presented, evaluated, and answered. An examination of the context of Joel 2:31 and Malachi 4:5 has revealed a fault in the pre-wrath position: the Joel passage does not occur at the sixth seal in conjunction with cosmic disturbances; and both the Joel and Malachi passages are not interpreted consistently with a biblical concept of DOL.

It was shown that a biblical concept of DOL sees this term as describing an extended period of time, beginning with the 70th week of Daniel and continuing to the eternal state, as well as specific, individual events which may occur at one or many points inside this

extended period. Context must determine exactly what the author means by his particular use of DOL.

Approaching the scriptures with a biblical understanding of DOL reconciles the apparent conflict between these two precursors of DOL and a pre-tribulational rapture position. These two passages refer to specific events at the end of the 70th week of Daniel and not to the extended DOL, which begins at the start of Daniel's 70th week and extends up to the eternal state. A pre-tribulational rapture position can also allow a time gap between the rapture and the beginning of DOL, also reconciling these passages with a rapture which is pre-tribulational. Pre-tribulationalism has proven itself to be a biblical system of interpretation.

Notes:

[1] Richard Mayhue, "The Prophet's Watchword: Day of the Lord," *GTJ* (1985) 6:2. See his survey of the literature on DOL pages 232-233.

[2] Marvin Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990) 115

[3] Ibid, 118

[4] Paul S. Karleen, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church: Is It Biblical?* (Langhorne, PA: BF Press, 1991) 22-41

[5] Renald Showers, "Pre-tribulation Rapture." (Unpublished paper, n.d.) 31-36. See also Karleen, 51-59.

[6] Rosenthal, 137-153

[7] Ibid, 155-161

[8] Ibid, 150

[9] Ibid

[10] Ibid, 153

[11] Mayhue, 241-242

[12] Showers, 39

[13] Rosenthal, 117

[14] Mayhue, 245

[15] Showers, 46

[16] Ibid, 41

[17] Rosenthal, 155

[18] Ibid, 155-156

[19] Ibid, 157

[20] Ibid, 158

[21] Karleen, 69

[22] Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987) 268-269

[23] Ibid, 261
[24] Ibid
[25] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. "The Promise of the Arrival of Elijah in Malachi and the Gospels," *GTJ* (1982) 3:229
[26] Dwight J. Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1964) 310
[27] Rosenthal, 158-159
[28] Mayhue, 245
[29] Rosenthal, 159
[30] Showers, 37
[31] Karleen, 64-67