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## A Critique of a Pre-Wrath Rapture Position

Rocco Piserchia

"For thirty years a confirmed pretribulationist, he now believes that the Church will have to endure the persecution of the Antichrist."<sup>1</sup> With such sensational claims, Marvin J. Rosenthal has charted new territory in the rapture debate with his book *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* which sets forth his novel rapture position. Rosenthal is evidently quite committed to his rapture beliefs, so much so that he resigned as executive director of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry (hereafter referred to as F.O.I.) after having served as executive director for nearly sixteen years.<sup>2</sup> Rosenthal initially attempted to persuade the board of F.O.I. to broaden their interpretation of the mission's doctrinal statement to accommodate his new view.<sup>3</sup> However in May of 1989, the board refused to allow a de facto change in their doctrinal statement, therefore Rosenthal was unable to sign the doctrinal statement "in good conscience" and resigned as executive director."<sup>4</sup>

This critique of Rosenthal's book will evaluate his position regarding the Day of the Lord, his concept of the church, and a few obvious inconsistencies in his development. The critique will also evaluate his procedure, making numerous observations regarding research and publication.

### The Position of This New Presentation

Rosenthal's beliefs regarding the rapture and eschatology in general are confusing and, for the most part, erroneous. Approximately one year has elapsed since the publication of *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* and already some critics have exposed major flaws in Rosenthal's system.<sup>5</sup> The most detailed critique of Rosenthal's position to date is *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church: Is It Biblical?* by Paul S. Karleen. Dr. Karleen demonstrated that

within four crucial components of sound hermeneutics: 1) correspondence to the facts; 2) accuracy concerning language; 3) attention to context; and 4) logical consistency, Rosenthal fails to prove his thesis.<sup>6</sup> This section will survey some of the more prominent errors in *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* that further prove Rosenthal's position is not tenable.

### **Day of the Lord Disarray**

In essence Rosenthal's entire position rests on his interpretation of the Day of the Lord (hereafter often referred to as DOL). "The objective of this volume is to demonstrate that the Day of the Lord is the time of divine wrath."<sup>7</sup> If Rosenthal's definition of the DOL is errant, his thesis will be proven false. Central to Rosenthal's concept of the DOL is God's wrath; much discussion in his book is devoted to the precise timing of the DOL, which is presented as a technical phrase for the eschatological manifestation of God's wrath. "The starting point of the Day of the Lord is a watershed issue in the Rapture debate, for the Rapture of the church is an integral part . . . of the Day of the Lord."<sup>8</sup> In describing his understanding of the DOL the author states:

The [OT] prophets sometimes used a near specific period of divine judgment as a basis for prophesying concerning the eschatological (last) great judgment, or Day of the Lord. In this instance, the two (the near and the far) almost appear to merge together (Isa. 13:6; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11). And sometimes the prophets spoke directly of the future eschatological Day of the Lord, the cataclysmic climax to man's sinful epochs of existence (Isa. 2:12). Those passages which spoke of a near judgment always anticipated the eschatological or final Day of the Lord. The prophets, in their prophetic visions and messages, often say as a comprehensive whole that which history unfolds as separate, chronological events.<sup>9</sup>

At least three problems are found in this quotation. First, the DOL is not "the eschatological (last) great judgment." The Great White Throne is God's final eschatological judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). The Great White Throne Judgment occurs after the millennium, while Rosenthal's DOL occurs before the millennium. Rosenthal also wrote that "the Day of the Lord is the fulfillment of the end which God planned before the beginning (Isa. 46:10)."<sup>10</sup> Rosenthal asserts that said fulfillment occurs before the creation of the new heaven and the

new earth (Rev. 21:1). After quoting 1 Cor. 15:24 ("Then comes the end, when He [Christ] delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power"<sup>11</sup>), Rosenthal states, "The end to which Paul referred is the final Day of the Lord judgment. The church will be raptured, and then the end -- God's wrath -- will fall upon an unrepentant world."<sup>12</sup> The author's interpretation of 1 Cor. 15:24 ignores the immediate context and the content of the verse itself, which address Christ's activity *after* the millennial kingdom.

Second, the author asserts that, "Those passages which spoke of a near judgment always anticipated the eschatological or final Day of the Lord."<sup>13</sup> His assertion is proven false in that at least two OT prophets restricted the DOL to times of near judgment. Amos 5:18-20 reads:

Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, And a bear met him; Or as though he went into the house, Leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?

Similar to most other DOL passages, the context must be carefully considered to determine if near judgment, eschatological judgment, or both are involved. Richard Mayhue wrote his Th.D. dissertation on the meaning of the DOL in the OT. Mayhue astutely observes, "Many contrasts appear which at first seem to be contradictory. In various DOL texts contemporary history is in view (Isa. 13:6, Joel 1:15), but in other texts there are predictions that clearly relate to the future (2 Thess. 2:2, 2 Pet. 3:10). . . this work will examine the biblical meaning of DOL in order to discern whether (1) DOL is always used to refer to the same event or if it is used of several events and whether (2) DOL has already occurred, or if it will occur in the future, or if DOL is used of both past and future events."<sup>14</sup> Mayhue concludes that Amos' use of the DOL was limited to near judgment. "The day Amos envisioned was the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17). Amos stresses the inevitability of this destruction (5:19-20). In Amos, DOL is not used to portray the eschatological expression of God's judgment."<sup>15</sup> Mayhue concluded that Ezekiel's use of the DOL was also restricted to contemporary judgment.<sup>16</sup>

Third, Rosenthal claims that some OT prophets used the phrase DOL to describe both times of judgment which were near to them and the eschatological DOL, "the prophets sometimes used a near specific period of divine judgment as a basis for prophesying concerning the eschatological (last) great judgment, or Day of the Lord . . . Those passages which spoke of a near judgment always anticipated the eschatological or final Day of the Lord."<sup>17</sup> Rosenthal also states, ". . . the expressions *the day of the Lord*, coming, and *appearance* are tied together and used interchangeably in anticipation of the opening of the seventh seal."<sup>18</sup> However in the author's attempt to refute Charles Ryrie's interpretation that the DOL includes the millennium, he seriously contradicts himself by assigning a technical definition of the DOL limited to eschatology. "Ryrie equates the phrase 'in that day' in a millennial context with the Day of the Lord. *However, the phrase 'in that day' is not a technical term restricted to one period of time (italics added).*"<sup>19</sup> Rosenthal also stated, "The very character of God demands that He one day judge this sinful planet and bring man's rebellion to an end. The Bible refers to that still-future day of judgment as the Day of the Lord."<sup>20</sup> Rosenthal also refers ". . . to the clear biblical teaching of a comprehensive, singular, eschatological Day of the Lord."<sup>21</sup> The author undeniably contradicts himself in defining the DOL and therefore nullifies his elaborate tribulation and DOL chronology.<sup>22</sup>

Rosenthal also contradicts himself concerning signs before the DOL. In a summary statement pertaining to 2 Pet. 3:10, the author asserts, "The Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, and the heavens and the earth will be judged by fire."<sup>23</sup> However Rosenthal then includes two chapters (10 and 11) which detail why he believes both cosmic disturbances and the coming of Elijah must precede the DOL. "The clear and repeated teaching of the Word of God is that there must be a *cosmic disturbance* of considerable magnitude before the Day of the Lord begins."<sup>24</sup> "Now the prophet Malachi proclaims that Elijah will appear *before* the Day of the Lord commences (Mal. 4:5)."<sup>25</sup> The author's position that the DOL will come as a thief in the night becomes even more tenuous when one realizes that he places both the first six seals of Revelation 5 and the sign of Christ's coming (Matt. 24:3) *before* the DOL.<sup>26</sup>

## Dispensational Distortion

Throughout *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* the author never provided a definition of the Church. Failure to provide a definition of the Church is inexcusable in a work that alleges to clarify the meaning of the rapture of the Church. Rosenthal further undermines his own credibility by claiming that his interpretation is dispensational, e.g., "Pretribulation rapturism is once again mortally wounded, this time by an unstrained, *dispensational* (italics added), premillennial, and literal interpretation of Paul's teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2."<sup>27</sup> "Rightly understood, neither dispensationalism nor premillennialism are infringed upon or injured by the church entering the seventieth week of Daniel to experience a prewrath rapture."<sup>28</sup> "In the first chapter, the author acknowledged that he writes as a lover from within the dispensational, premillennial camp, and not as an opponent from without. That attitude has not diminished."<sup>29</sup>

Dispensationalism, as a hermeneutic and a theological system, maintains that a distinction exists between Israel and the Church. Charles C. Ryrie wrote what is generally acknowledged as the finest dispensational apologetic, *Dispensationalism Today*, in which he clarified the distinct identities of the Church and Israel.

The nature of the Church is a crucial point of difference between dispensationalism and other doctrinal viewpoints. Indeed, ecclesiology, or the doctrine of the Church, is the touchstone of dispensationalism. . . . All nondispensationalists blur to some extent the distinction between Israel and the Church. Such blurring fails to recognize the contrast that is maintained in Scripture between Israel, the Gentiles, and the Church. In the New Testament natural Israel and the Gentiles are contrasted. Israel is addressed as a nation in contrast to Gentiles *after* the church was established at Pentecost (Acts 3:12; 4:8, 10; 5:21, 31, 35; 21:28). In Paul's prayer for natural Israel (Rom. 10:1) there is a clear reference to Israel as a national people as distinct from and outside the Church. Further, natural Israel and the Church are also contrasted in the New Testament. Paul wrote: "Give none offense, neither to the Jews, not to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God" (1 Cor. 10:32). . . . In addition, believing Jews and believing Gentiles, which together make up the Church in this age, continue to be distinguished in the New Testament, proving that the term *Israel* still means the physical descendants of Abraham.<sup>30</sup>

Robert P. Lightner concurs with Ryrice regarding the substance of dispensationalism.

Friends and foes of dispensationalism must agree that the all-determinative conviction without which one cannot be a dispensationalist is the distinction between God's program for Israel and His program for the church. This distinction is based solidly on the literal . . . interpretation of Scripture. A consistently literal or normal hermeneutic brings one to see distinctions in God's program with Israel and His program with the church, and that underscores the theological rather than the soteriological nature of God's primary purpose in the world.<sup>31</sup>

Rosenthal, implicitly or explicitly, confused the Church with Israel a minimum of seventeen times.<sup>32</sup> The author's failure to distinguish between Israel and the Church was particularly disturbing in his treatment of the Olivet Discourse. Rosenthal builds on hermeneutical sand by granting exceptional significance to the Olivet Discourse, "The Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24-25) will be *a central text* (italics added). It is the author's contention that the Olivet Discourse is Jewish in character, sequential in progression, logical in argument, parallel to the seals of Revelation 6 in nature, covers the seventieth week of Daniel in scope, answers the dual question concerning the Lord's coming and the end of the age posed by the disciples (which was the catalyst for the Lord's teaching), and encompasses both the Rapture and the return of Christ within its borders."<sup>33</sup> Although the author claimed that the Olivet Discourse "is Jewish in character," he included the Church as part of Christ's audience.<sup>34</sup>

As previously stated, Rosenthal intentionally or unintentionally confused Israel and the Church throughout his entire book. (One of the more prominent examples of Rosenthal's nondispensational hermeneutic concerns 2 Thess. 2, "The apostasy, then to which Paul referred (2 Thess. 2:3-4), will involve Israel, not the church."<sup>35</sup>) The author was extremely negligent in that he only devoted less than one and a half pages<sup>34</sup> to explain how his position blends the Church with Israel during the first 63 months of Daniel's seventieth week.

The church did not exist before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, so the church could not possibly be in the Old Testament. The church does exist now, however, so it *can* be in the seventieth week. That is precisely what the Word of God teaches [no Scripture texts are immediately referenced]. . . The passing away of the old

economy to establish the new necessitated a period of transition where, for a short time, righteous men of both economies coexisted. It may well be that God gave a biblical generation (forty years) for the transition—from Christ's death in A.D. 30 to the destruction of the temple and cessation of the priesthood in A.D. 70. During those years God had no trouble keeping Israel and the church distinct. That is precisely what will occur when God begins Israel's seventieth week. It will again be a transitional period, in reverse this time, from the church to Israel.<sup>37</sup>

There are at least two critical flaws in Rosenthal's "dispensationalism." 1) The author admits that the Church was not present during the first 69 weeks with Israel,<sup>38</sup> therefore the burden of proof rests with him to explain precisely why the Church has a part in the seventieth week. Merely stating that the Church *can* theoretically be in the seventieth week of Daniel because it came into existence before the seventieth week, as opposed to the first 69 weeks which elapsed before Pentecost, in and of itself proves nothing. 2) Rosenthal's view of the transition from law to the Church is faulty. God did not respect any of the temple sacrifices immediately after Christ died as the world's propitiation; the rent veil in the temple (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38) and the book of Hebrews<sup>39</sup> (which in all probability was written before the temple was destroyed<sup>40</sup>) both confirm God's rejection of temple sacrifices after Jesus was crucified.

Though not cited, it certainly appears that Rosenthal borrowed his transitional argument to permit the church to enter the tribulation from Robert H. Gundry. "The change in dispensations at the dawn of the Church age was gradual, extending over a period of years, rather than immediate and clean-cut may lead us to expect a similar transitional period in the twilight of the Church age. This future period of transition might well be the tribulation, during which God finishes His dealings with the Church and prepares Israel and the nations for the millennial kingdom of Christ."<sup>41</sup> The fact that Rosenthal follows Gundry does not strengthen Rosenthal's position, since he asserts, ". . . I found an abundance of arguments which I believe devastate posttribulationism. [Although] I read with profit Robert Gundry's well-written posttribulational book, *The Church and the Tribulation*. . ."<sup>42</sup>

## Internal Inconsistencies

As with the DOL, Rosenthal employs a technical definition of *wrath* to support his system, however when it is not convenient the author proposes that certain other related terms can be used interchangeable.

It is significant to note that not once is the word *wrath* used before Revelation 6:16-17 or in describing the six seals. Only with the opening of the seventh seal and beyond is the word *wrath* mentioned in the book of Revelation. It can rightly be insisted, therefore, that the use of the word *wrath* is restricted to the events of the trumpets and bowels and, therefore, exempts the first six seals.<sup>45</sup>

On the page immediately preceding the author reasons in a different manner.

In the phrase, 'the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?,' [Rev. 6:17] John is undeniably alluding to Malachi 3:2. The prophet Malachi wrote, 'But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth?' In Revelation 6:17 what John calls the 'great day of his wrath,' Malachi calls the 'day of his coming' and 'when he appeareth.' Therefore, the expressions *the day of the Lord*, coming, and *appearance* are tied together and used interchangeably in anticipation of the opening of the seventh seal.<sup>46</sup>

The differences between the two quotations above illustrate: 1) When it is to the advantage of the author's thesis, a technical definition for a term is contrived, as is the case with *wrath* in the book of Revelation. 2) When it is not to the advantage of the author's thesis, different terms cannot be limited to technical definitions and have to be used interchangeably. This is most injurious with DOL, as demonstrated under the previous section, "Day of the Lord Disarray."<sup>45</sup> 3) Since Rosenthal believes that Malachi 3:2 refers to the same event and time as Revelation 6:17, the word *wrath* should have been legitimately included in his list of interchangeable expressions with *the day of the Lord*, coming, and *appearance*. 4) If Rosenthal had been consistent and included *wrath* with his list of interchangeable expressions, the technical definition assigned to *wrath* in Revelation would appear even more artificial than it already does.

Rosenthal's position is not internally consistent with regard to resurrection, which is an integral part of the rapture. After quoting 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, the author states, "the Rapture must occur at the opening of the seventh seal [Rev. 8:1] and immediately prior to the beginning of God's wrath. That interpretation is unstrained and biblically accurate."<sup>46</sup> However in discussing the tribulation martyrs of Revelation 6:10, Rosenthal declares, "They are given white robes and told to 'rest for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled' (Rev. 6:11). *These martyrs are to be resurrected and given bodies on the first day of the Millennium* (Rev. 20:4)"<sup>47</sup> (italics added). For no apparent reason Rosenthal does not include the tribulation martyrs (Rev. 6:11) in the resurrection of his pre-wrath rapture (Rev. 8:1), but believes they will have to wait 21 months (the time of his DOL) until the beginning of the millennium to be raised. The most detailed passage in the Bible regarding the rapture clearly teaches that the resurrection of those believers who are alive during the rapture will not precede the resurrection of those who died in Christ:

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:13-17).

The author also failed to comprehend the doctrine of the eternal security of the believer in Jesus Christ. The book of Revelation teaches that all who accept the Beast will perish eternally in the Lake of Fire.

He [the beast out of the earth] was granted power to give breath to the image of the first beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. And he causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on

their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name" (Rev. 13:15-17). ". . . If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of his indignation. And he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name (Rev. 14:9-11).

Rosenthal implied that church-age saints could potentially lose their salvation in that he maintains that they could be deceived by the Antichrist. In the chapter "The Prewrath Rapture: Catalyst for Holy Living," the author declares:

First, if the prewrath Rapture is correct, *the church* (italics added) will enter the seventieth week of Daniel to encounter the difficulties of that period and the Antichrist himself. If it does so, having been taught and convinced of an imminent pretribulation Rapture, the consequences will be calamitous. The church will enter that period unprepared, spiritually naked, vulnerable, and ripe for the Antichrist's deception.\*

Rosenthal did not explain how believers could be deceived by the Antichrist without accepting his mark. Furthermore the author's concern is inconsequential, since he admits that believers will be martyred by the Antichrist.\* Theoretically, even if church saints are permitted to enter Daniel's seventieth week, the fact that they believed in the prewrath rapture beforehand would not prevent them from being slaughtered.

The author also appealed to Revelation 20:15 in an attempt to demonstrate that *believers* need the catalyst of the prewrath rapture as an incentive for holiness in life.

Second, a prewrath rapture which acknowledges that one generation of the church will enter and face the challenge of the seventieth week becomes a catalyst for holy living. . . The Word of God is saturated with incentives and warnings—the promise of blessing for obedience or cursing for disobedience, crowns or judgments. Men do not naturally do their best. The Bible is filled with *incentives for*

*righteous living* (Gen. 12:3) and *punishment for unrighteous living* (Rev. 20:15).<sup>30</sup>

However, Revelation 20:15 reads, "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast in the lake of fire." Therefore hell cannot be construed as a negative incentive for the believer in Jesus Christ to avoid, unless eternal security is false.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Procedure Which Produced This New Position**

Rosenthal stated, "I have written as simply as I can. In the technical sense, I am not a scholar, nor do I write primarily for scholars. But that is not to infer that the book is not scholarly" (p. 34). The author did not explain how he could produce a scholarly work without being a scholar. (This enigma was also noted by Karleen, p. 92.) The following list will illustrate a variety of deficiencies in the scholarship of *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*. This section should not be construed as a personal attack upon the character of the author, but rather an evaluation of the veracity of the author's book. It should also be noted that the author is absolutely convinced of the truthfulness of his thesis in his own mind, "Men will scrutinize this book. They will search its pages, probing for weakness and vulnerability. . . Flaws may be found . . . but I am convinced that the basic tenets found within these pages will not be successfully assaulted. Its gates will not be breached" (pp. 292-293).

At the outset of his book, Rosenthal made a point of stressing that he had done a substantial amount of study *before* he absolutely rejected the trustworthiness of pretribulationism. "I had been exposed to pretribulation thinking most of my life. Nonetheless, I went back and read from my heroes: John F. Walvoord,. . . Charles C. Ryrie,. . . J. Dwight Pentecost,. . . I also consulted numerous commentaries on Daniel, Matthew, the Gospel of John, 1 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1 John, Revelation; books on the Rapture; books on the Millennium; an unpublished doctoral dissertation on 'The Day of the Lord;' articles that were recommended; and back to the earlier mentioned eighty-eight page refutation [pp. 20, 21]. I would read it again; perhaps I had missed something, anything that would allow me *genuine* reasonable doubt for the position toward which I was being increasingly drawn. I prayed for a way out. I wanted it so badly. . . But I could not find the

'reasonable doubt' that I sought, though I searched with my whole heart" (pp. 25-26).

Upon close examination, several observations concerning the procedure can be made:

a) The book had no bibliography, subject index, nor author index, merely endnotes and a Scripture index.

b) The endnotes were rather sparse, only covering less than six and one half pages (pp. 301-307) for a 299 page book.

c) The sum total of all references to Biblical commentaries was only 23 (not including study Bibles, i.e., *Ryrie Study Bible*, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, and *The Annotated Study Bible*). Of the 23 citations, only 14 commentaries were used. Of the 14 commentaries, 8 were commentaries on the book of Revelation. Therefore excluding the book of Revelation, only 6 commentaries were referenced. However, Rosenthal did claim that 40 commentaries on Revelation were consulted in his study of Revelation 6:17 (p. 167).

d) Although Rosenthal stated that he rejected the arguments presented in the 88 page "refutation" (pp. 20, 21, 25, 26), he never directly discussed any of the arguments, much less his reasons for dismissing them.

e) In all fairness to the author, it needs to be noted that he did provide one line of reasoning which may help to explain the scarcity of references. "I write in gratitude to those pretribulationist scholars from whom I have profited so much and I think they are wrong or inconsistent in their teaching on the Rapture. Consequently, I will sometimes use terms like 'pretribulationists say,' or 'many hold,' or 'some have suggested,' although I have in my files specific names, quotes, and sources. There will be some essential exceptions" (pp. 33, 34). First, the author appeals to evidence which cannot be verified by his readers. Second, the author's gracious intentions are irrelevant in an academic discussion; the fact that he wrote a book which details a non-pre-tribulationist rapture position is an affront to all pretribulationist scholars. Furthermore, the author wrote quite belligerently about pretribulationists in more than one instance, e.g., "I perceived then, and continue to believe, that the underlying problem is not the details of the position taken in this book. Rather, it is the pure shock that one's position on a significant area of prophecy is being threatened" (p. 30). "God expects His children to descend and dig deeply for the truth to be found in the inexhaustible treasure chest of His Word. It is the God-ordained method. But

occasionally one wonders if rigidity in a position has not caused some interpreters to mine 'fool's gold,' which shines but has no value" (p. 60). "It is, above all else, for that reason that a logical, unforced, chronological unfolding of Revelation has evaded pretribulation, premillennial commentators and, in large measure, is the explanation for the fact that the last book of the Bible has largely remained an unsolvable riddle for students of the Word to this very hour" (p. 112). "The suggestion [held by pretribulationists]. . . ought not to be taken seriously by those who honor God's Word" (p. 228).

f) Rosenthal never referenced any type of Hebrew grammatical or lexical works. He also failed to reference any Greek grammar. The author did cite three different Greek lexical works for a total of six references. The Greek lexical works cited were: 1) *Wuest's Word Studies in the Greek New Testament* (cited twice) 2) *[Vine's] Expository Dictionary of the New Testament* (cited three times) 3) *The Greek New Testament* by Henry Alford (cited once).

1) Rosenthal's lack of grammatical expertise was sorely evident in his discussion of Revelation 6:17, "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (NKJV). The author argued that the verb translated "has come" (*eelthen*, from *erkomai*) is properly understood as a dramatic aorist, which indicates that the action of the verb is future. (This is extremely important for Rosenthal, since he assigned a technical definition to "wrath" and believes that the rapture immediately precedes God's wrath.) The author appealed to works by John Sproule, Paul Feinberg, D.A. Carson, and Gary Cohen, but it must be stressed that *no* reference was made to any Greek grammar. The quotation by Carson was inconsequential, since it merely addressed the fact that the aorist "simply refers to the action itself without specifying whether the action is unique, repeated, ingressive, instantaneous, past, or accomplished" (p. 165). Rosenthal misrepresented Feinberg by strongly implying that Feinberg only believed that the verb in question could be interpreted as either an ingressive aorist or a dramatic aorist which function like a future tense (p. 165). Rosenthal quoted p. 59 of Feinberg, however, he neglected to mention that Feinberg argued on the following page that the aorist verb in question ". . . could just as well be constative or complexive. This would mean that the wrath of God has come, not just in the

sixth seal, but in the six seals viewed as a whole" (Feinberg, p. 60). Rosenthal also neglected Feinberg's conclusion, "The activity of the *whole* period proceeds from the activity of the worthy Lamb; it is He who breaks the seals (Rev. 5:11-14; cf. Rev. 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11). *One cannot exegetically classify various kinds of wrath and distinguish their recipients, and thus avoid the conclusion that the whole seventieth week is a time of God's retributive wrath*" (italics added) (Feinberg, p. 62). (Concerning Rosenthal's treatment of the aorist in Rev. 6:17, also see Mulholland, pp. 3-4 and Karleen, pp. 54-56.)

2) Rosenthal stated on p. 232, "In their [Greek scholars] scrutiny, they have exhausted the numerous grammars and lexicons, the Septuagint, classical Greek, and the Bible itself to arrive at an understanding of the phrase, 'I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation' (Rev. 3:10." The author never displayed any evidence that he interacted at any level with grammars, lexicons, the LXX, classical Greek, and N.T. Greek, however he presents himself as one whose interpretation of Revelation 3:10 is solely correct (pp. 233-241). In essence Rosenthal seems to imply that since scholarship is not uniform regarding the interpretation of Revelation 3:10, scholarship was not necessary to properly understand the verse (p. 233). Rosenthal contradicts himself in his interpretation, since he claims the verse "refers to protection for the Great Tribulation, which occurs before the Rapture and the Day of the Lord begins" (p. 234), then states that, "Believers will be severely persecuted in that day. Some will be sent into captivity. Others will be slain" (p. 236).

3) The author repeatedly made assertions without providing any evidence, even when he stated what certain words mean, e.g., "To overcome is to vanquish the enemy, to be triumphant over difficulty" (p. 290).

h) Rosenthal stated, "I read with profit Robert Gundry's well-written posttribulation book, *The Church and the Tribulation*, which identified and then did radical surgery on some areas of pretribulationism, and John Sproule's excellent, if brief in some areas courageously concessionary, responses to Gundry" (p. 26). A few

points should be noted: 1) Rosenthal did not specifically mention any of the areas in which Gundry allegedly did "radical surgery" on pretribulationism. 2) Rosenthal also failed to specifically mention any of the areas in which Sproule was "courageously concessionary" to Gundry. 3) Throughout the entire book, the author never referenced John Walvoord's critique of Gundry, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976). To the best of this author's knowledge, no one has yet refuted Walvoord's critique of Gundry. Rosenthal chose to cite Sproule against Gundry, and it was evident he sympathized with the latter (pp. 54, 55).

i) Rosenthal closely identified his pre-wrath position with pretribulationism. "I will write as a love from within the pretribulation camp, not as an opponent from without, seeking to nudge others to a modification of their view with what I believe to be biblical" (p. 33). "This book will not initially be perceived by some as an ally to pretribulationism, but I believe that history will one day substantiate it as such" (p. 33). In actuality, the author's thesis has a far greater similarity to posttribulationism, since chronologically the pre-wrath rapture is supposed to occur merely 21 months before the end of the tribulation, which is 63 months after the beginning of Daniel's seventieth week (p. 112).

j) In attempting to disprove the pretribulation argument that the church is not present in chapters 4-21 of Revelation, Rosenthal states this "not only is compatible with a pre-wrath Rapture but gives it essential support" (p. 245). However, the author never attempted to explain why no mention of the church (or churches) is made during the period of the first six seals (Rev. 6:1-17), in which he maintains the church is still present on the earth.

## Summary

The position of the pre-wrath rapture of the Church has been demonstrated to be critically flawed. This paper has limited criticism to some of the most blatant errors which characterize Rosenthal's thesis. The pre-wrath rapture position can safely be rejected on any one of three grounds: 1) DOL Disarray; 2) Dispensational Distortion; or 3) Internal Inconsistencies; however, when the three areas of criticism are considered together, Rosenthal's thesis is demolished. The pre-wrath rapture, similar to post-tribulationism, renders the blessed hope of the church inconsequential<sup>32</sup> in that the

vast majority of believers who enter the tribulation would be killed *before* the rapture. Rosenthal's view is further at variance with the Scriptures in that he collapses the rapture and Christ's return at the final Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-21) into one integrated series of events, explained as the coming (*parousia*) of Christ.<sup>55</sup>

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Rosenthal, Marvin, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990) back-cover

<sup>2</sup> Rosenthal, 23

<sup>3</sup> Rosenthal, 28-29, and 32. In Rosenthal's mind such radical hermeneutical revision was not equivalent to simply changing the wording of the doctrinal statement to accommodate nonpretribulational rapture views. "Never was consideration given to changing the doctrinal position to reflect my view. That would have been unfair to the entire Mission family" (p. 28). Duplicity regarding the plain meaning of "imminence" and "imminent," similar to what Rosenthal desired for F.O.I., is found in the Evangelical Free Church. "The EFCA appears to be allowing latitude in the understanding of the term *imminent* for both the faculty of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and ministerial candidates for ordination. This is in keeping with the ethos of the Free Church: 'For believers only, but all believers' (Archer, Gleason; et. al.; *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulational?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984) 44.

<sup>4</sup> Rosenthal, 32

<sup>5</sup> The two most thorough critiques are by Paul S. Karleen, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church: Is It Biblical?* (Langhorne, PA: BF Press, 1991) and Gerald B. Stanton, "A Review of 'The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church,'" *BibSac* (January-March 1991) 148:90-111.

<sup>6</sup> Karleen, 11

<sup>7</sup> Rosenthal, 35

<sup>8</sup> Rosenthal, 176

<sup>9</sup> Rosenthal, 125

<sup>10</sup> Rosenthal, 124

<sup>11</sup> *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). All Scripture quotations are from the *NKJV*, except for those cited in Rosenthal (which are from the *KJV*) and other works.

<sup>12</sup> Rosenthal, 219

<sup>13</sup> Rosenthal, 125

<sup>14</sup> Mayhue, Richard L., "The Prophet's Watchword: Day of the Lord," *GTJ* (1985) 6:231-246. This article is a summary of his unpublished doctoral dissertation, which Rosenthal referenced three times (Rosenthal, 301, 302, 303).

<sup>15</sup> Mayhue, 238

<sup>16</sup> Mayhue, 241-242; the texts under discussion are Ezekiel 13:5 and 30:3.

<sup>17</sup> Rosenthal, 125

<sup>18</sup> Rosenthal, 170

<sup>19</sup> Rosenthal, 129

<sup>20</sup> Rosenthal, 115

<sup>21</sup> Rosenthal, 159

<sup>22</sup> For example, see Rosenthal pages 137-211. Richard Mayhue declares, "The DOL is a biblical phrase used by God's prophets to describe either the immediate future or the ultimate eschatological consummation. *It is not a technical term in the sense that it always refers only to one event in God's plan* [italics added]. . . DOL is used to describe several events and is limited only by its mention in biblical revelation. Each appearance of DOL must be interpreted in its context to determine whether the prophet expected the immediate historical act of God or Yahweh's ultimate eschatological visitation" ("The Prophet's Watchword: Day of the Lord," p. 245). Walvoord comments, "Mentioned frequently in the Old Testament, the Day of the Lord refers to any special period where God intervenes supernaturally, bringing judgment on the world. An outstanding illustration is the book of Joel which has as its theme the Day of the Lord. The term is properly used of the crisis that occurred in the time of Joel brought on by the infestation of locusts which ruined their crops, bringing starvation and destruction" (John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, ILL: Scripture Press Publications, 1990) 486. See Joel 1:15-20.

<sup>23</sup> Rosenthal, 134. The author's belief that no sign will precede the DOL was stressed on page 131.

<sup>24</sup> Rosenthal, 148

<sup>25</sup> Rosenthal, 158. Cf. the charts on pages 149 and 161.

<sup>26</sup> Rosenthal, 110, 111, 149. Cf. Stanton, 98.

<sup>27</sup> Rosenthal, 210

<sup>28</sup> Rosenthal, 264

<sup>29</sup> Rosenthal, 244

<sup>30</sup> Ryrie, Charles C., *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1965) 132, 137, 138

<sup>31</sup> Lightner, Robert P., "Theonomy and Dispensationalism," *BibSac* (January-March 1986) 34

<sup>32</sup> Rosenthal, 61, 81, 105, 109, 137, 144, 170, 174, 175, 185, 196, 198, 205, 206, 210, 224, and 258.

<sup>33</sup> Rosenthal, 60-61

<sup>34</sup> For example see Rosenthal page 144.

<sup>35</sup> Rosenthal, 206. Cf. Stanton, 105-106.

<sup>36</sup> Rosenthal, 263-264

<sup>37</sup> Rosenthal, 263

<sup>38</sup> Rosenthal, 262

<sup>39</sup> See Hebrews 8-10.

<sup>40</sup> E.F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971) 380; "Yet if the writer had been able to point to so decisive an event as the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, it would fit so well with his general thesis of the outmoded character of the old order

that it is hard to see how he could have avoided using it. Therefore a date prior to A.D. 70 is likely."

<sup>41</sup> Gundry, Robert H., *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973) 21. To Gundry's credit he devoted an entire chapter to confront dispensational issues (ch. 2, pp. 12-28), unlike Rosenthal, who as previously mentioned, attempted to deal with dispensational objections in less than one and a half pages (263-264).

<sup>42</sup> Rosenthal, 26

<sup>43</sup> Rosenthal, 171

<sup>44</sup> Rosenthal, 170

<sup>45</sup> Rosenthal is also guilty of the same type of lexical revision pertaining to *parousia*, which he arbitrarily defines as "coming and consequent presence" (229). Also see pp. 216-221.

<sup>46</sup> Rosenthal, 194; see the chart on the same page.

<sup>47</sup> Rosenthal, 183

<sup>48</sup> Rosenthal, 281

<sup>49</sup> "Believers will be severely persecuted in that day. Some will be sent into captivity. Others will be slain" (Rosenthal, 236).

<sup>50</sup> Rosenthal, 284

<sup>51</sup> Two texts among many that prove the eternal security of believers are John 10:28 and Romans 8:35-39.

<sup>52</sup> Mayhue, Richard L., *Snatched Before the Storm! A Case for Pretribulationism* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1980) 9-10. Keith Pisani's one page article is also insightful in pointing out the Rosenthal's position is very similar to posttribulationism. Pisani, Keith, "Pre-Wrath Rapture or Modified Posttribulationism?" *The Baptist Bulletin* (December 1990) 23.

<sup>53</sup> Rosenthal was extremely silent concerning the nature of Christ's activity during the DOL: or the last 21 months of the tribulation, i.e. the period of time between the pre-wrath rapture and the Battle of Armageddon. "This coming commences *before* the end of the seventieth week, and is consummated after the end of the seventieth week (Rev. 19:11)" (p. 110). "First, the Rapture of the church will occur; that will then be followed by the Lord's judgment of the wicked *as He begins His physical return to the earth!*" (italics added, p. 113). Rosenthal continues to complicate his position by attempting to show that, "The coming (*parousia*) of Christ will include his continuing presence to rapture the church and his Day of the Lord judgment of the wicked. The other words employed to describe His coming or revelation focus on one aspect of his coming, whereas *parousia* is speaking of the totality of that glorious *series of events*" (p. 217). Karleen notes, "The most crucial feature of the collapsing of the two comings [the rapture and Christ's return at the Battle of Armageddon] is the lack of ability on the author's part to portray what Jesus is doing while He is present. . . He gives no scripture for this. Where is Jesus and what is He doing? The silence on this is deafening! He can give no information because there is no Scripture to support his position" (Karleen, p. 85; Also see his refutation of Rosenthal's definition of *parousia*, pp. 81-84.)