

## Sequencing the Tribulation

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**F**UTURISTS DISAGREE NOTORIOUSLY ABOUT whether the Parousia and Rapture will occur *before*, in the *middle*, or *after* the Tribulation and Wrath (resulting in Pre-Trib, Mid-Trib, Post-Trib, Pre-Wrath, or Post-Wrath views). And **Preterists** differ not only on how to *sequence* the Tribulation in relation to the Parousia and other end-time events, but also how to *define* it.

For instance, some preterists (e.g., Don K. Preston and others) equate the “Great Tribulation” (Matt 24:21) with God’s outpouring of wrath on the Jews during the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70, and then place the Parousia and Rapture “immediately after” that wrath was poured out. That is a Post-Trib and **Post-Wrath** Parousia.

In contrast to that, this author (and others) defines the Tribulation as having **two phases** – *tribulation* on the church, and *wrath* on the Jews, with the Parousia and Rapture occurring “immediately after” the tribulation was “cut short,” but before the wrath was poured out. This is a Post-Trib and **Pre-Wrath** Parousia.

Thus, here is how each of these two views sequence the Tribulation and Wrath in relation to the Parousia. Note the placement of the **Parousia** in each view:

**[Post-Wrath view]** “Great Tribulation” (*Wrath on Jews*) → **Parousia** and Rapture

**[Pre-Wrath view]** Tribulation on saints → **Parousia** and Rapture → *Wrath on Jews*

These two views (*Post-Wrath* versus *Pre-Wrath*) are mutually exclusive, which means that only one of them can be right. Therefore, in order to properly *sequence* the **Great Tribulation** in relation to the Parousia and other end-time events, we need to *identify* what it was and when it occurred. There are three key texts here in Matthew 24 which will help us do that (verses 9, 21-22, and 29).

### **‘Tribulation’ in Matthew 24:9**

“Then they will *deliver you to tribulation [persecution], and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name*” (Matt 24:9 NAS95).

Here in Matthew 24:9-13, 20-25 (and its parallel in Mark 13:12-13) Jesus warned His first-century disciples about the coming persecution, including its intensification during the Neronic **persecution** (AD 64-66). There is no hint that this “tribulation” included the wrath-outpouring. It is **persecution** on the saints only.

### **‘Great Tribulation’ in Matthew 24:21-22**

*“For then there will be a Great Tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Unless those days had been **cut short**, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be **cut short**.”* (Matt 24:21-22 NAS95).

These two verses are key to determining the **identity** of the “great tribulation” and its place in the **sequence** of end-time events. At first glance, the *great tribulation* seems to refer exclusively to the *wrath-outpouring* upon the Jews during their war with Rome (AD 66-70). And since Luke’s parallel account (Luke 21:22-23) describes this great tribulation as being “days of *vengeance, great distress* upon the land, and *wrath* to this people,” it means that the *great tribulation* has to include the **wrath-outpouring**.

However, we will show that the *great tribulation* also includes the **Neronic persecution**. We know this because verse 21 says that the great tribulation was already happening “then” (Gk. *tote*, “at the time”) when they saw the Abomination of Desolation. And this is further confirmed in Luke’s parallel account (Luke 21:12-19) where he says that the persecution of the saints would occur “**before**” all the other signs that Jesus predicted (Luke 21:8-11), including the Abomination of Desolation (Luke 21:20), and the Parousia (Luke 21:25-28). Thus, Luke sequences the persecution phase of the great tribulation “before” the Abomination and the wrath-outpouring.

Apostle Paul likewise teaches these **two phases** of the Great Tribulation, and sequences them the same way, when he says that the saints were **destined for tribulation** (1 Thess 3:3), but **not for the wrath** (1 Thess 5:9). Then he promised that they would be *rescued* and *saved* from the wrath **BEFORE it was poured out** on their Jewish persecutors at the Parousia (1 Thess 1:10; 5:9; 2 Thess 1:6-8).

This means that the persecution phase of the great tribulation did not begin **after** they saw the Abomination in AD 66, but instead was **already** ongoing and intensifying by the time of the Abomination and would be **cut short** so that some of the elect would remain alive until the Parousia (Matt 24:22).

Thus, it was the persecution that was *cut short*, NOT the wrath. And this reveals the fatal flaw of the **Post-Wrath** view. Since it identifies the great tribulation as the wrath-outpouring only, and does not include the Neronic persecution, it is forced to conclude that the wrath was

**cut short** and not allowed to run its full course!

But the wrath-outpouring was NOT **cut short**. On the contrary, Daniel 12:7 says that the Jews were to be *completely shattered*. Likewise, both Jesus and Paul said that the wickedness of the Jews *filled up the cup of wrath* which was *fully* (not partially) poured out on Jerusalem (Matt 23:32-36; 1 Thess 2:16). The Jews fully drank the cup of wrath down to its dregs. And the book of Revelation repeatedly shows how ALL of the wrath was poured out in full strength (Rev 14:6-11; cf. Rev 6:16-17; 11:18; 12:12; 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 19:15). None of God's wrath was held back or **cut short**.

Therefore, the Neronic persecution had to be included in the great tribulation so that it could be **cut short** by the outbreak of the Zealot rebellion in AD 66, when both Jews and Romans had to turn their attention away from killing Christians to fighting their own war. This is further reinforced when we see the same phrase "Great Tribulation" used in **Revelation 7:14**, where it refers to the same Neronic persecution that killed many saints from every nation in the Roman world, and which was cut short **before** the wrath was poured out.

This confirms that the Great Tribulation had **two phases**. The first was *persecution* on the saints, which intensified under Nero, and was then **cut short** so that some of the elect would remain alive until the Parousia. Then the second phase was the *wrath-outpouring* upon the unbelieving Jews who had persecuted the Christians. And we see both phases alluded to here in the Olivet Discourse, in Apostle Paul's epistles, and exhibited in the **real history** as it was recorded by the first-century historians.

This is why a knowledge of first century history is so vitally important. We cannot be certain that we are correctly *identifying* and *sequencing* these events without matching them to the actual history. This is why futurists must speculate and guess at all of this. But we preterists have the real history with which to nail it down with certainty.

### ***'Tribulation' in Matthew 24:29***

"But **immediately after the tribulation of those days** the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (Matt 24:29 NAS95).

This third mention of "tribulation" cannot refer to Christ coming "immediately after" the wrath was poured out, since that would imply that *the wrath had already been poured out before Christ came to pour it out!* Thus, the phrase "immediately after the tribulation" only makes sense if it is referring to the Neronic persecution being **cut short** just before Christ came to rescue His saints and pour out His wrath on their persecutors.

Since the **Post-Wrath** view teaches that the Parousia did not occur until *immediately after*

the siege of Jerusalem, it would mean that Jesus was NOT present during the siege when the wrath was being poured out. But that contradicts **2 Thessalonians 1:4-10**, which teaches that the purpose of the Parousia was to **give relief** to His saints and **deal out retribution** (pour out wrath) to their persecutors. So, the **Post-Wrath** view has Jesus coming to pour out the wrath **AFTER** it had already been poured out during the siege! *Do you catch the fallacy of that?*

## **Conclusion**

We have seen that there were **two phases** to the Great Tribulation (Neronic persecution and wrath-outpouring). The persecution was **cut short**, and then Christ came to pour out the wrath. This not only establishes the *identity* of the Great Tribulation, but also properly *sequences* it in relation to the Parousia and the other end-time events.

Thus, immediately after the persecution was cut short, Christ came with His angels to gather the elect (Matt 24:29-31). Those saints were **relieved** from the persecution, **rescued** by Christ, **taken to heaven**, and **rewarded** in His presence – **BEFORE** the **wrath** was poured out upon the unbelieving Jews. This shows that the Parousia and Rapture occurred **AFTER** the tribulation on the church was cut short (**Post-Trib**), but **BEFORE** the wrath was poured out (**Pre-Wrath**). So, it was a **Pre-Wrath** Parousia and Rapture.

*More detailed information about “Sequencing the Tribulation” will be presented in my ongoing “Rapture” debate with Don K. Preston. If you wish to receive it, simply send an email request to: [preterist1@preterist.org](mailto:preterist1@preterist.org)*