

THE PRE-CONFLAGRATION RAPTURE

Tom's Perspectives

by Thomas Ice

With the revival of premillennialism during the post-Reformation period, there have been a number of two-stage second coming theories postulated. There are numerous claims or suggestions of pre-trib rapture statements that have been made down through recent history. However, I think many of them should be grouped into a category that could be better described as “a two-stage second coming.” In other words, this species is not pretribulationism which is composed of the rapture of the church, followed by a few years of the tribulation, resulting in the second coming of Christ to earth. Instead, this variety occurs at the end of the tribulation and may have two stages involved in the second coming. Such a scenario is posttribulationist and may have as many as a 45-day interval between the two comings.

JOSEPH MEDE AND A TWO-STAGE SECOND COMING

The two-stage second coming view can be traced back to the father of English premillennialism Joseph Mede (1586–1638). Mede wrote in 1627 an answer to a question about the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4 as follows:

I will add this more, namely, what may be conceived to be the cause of this *Rapture* of the Saints on high to meet the Lord in the Clouds, rather than to wait his coming to the Earth. What if it be, that they may be preserved during the *Conflagration of the earth and the works thereof*, 2 Pet. 3. 10. that as *Noah* and his family were preserved from the Deluge by being lift up above the waters in the *Ark*; so should the Saints as the *Conflagration* be lift up in the Clouds unto their *Ark, Christ*, to be preserved there from the *deluge of fire*, wherein the wicked shall be consumed?¹

Mede taught a two-stage event in which “the Saints” will be raptured to meet the Lord as He descends in judgment at the second coming. While the conflagration judgment of 2 Peter 3:10 takes place on the earth, the saints remain safely in the clouds while the deluge of fire consumes the wicked and cleanses the heavens and earth in preparation for the millennium. After the 2 Peter 3:10 judgment, the saints return with the Lord to a renovated earth in order to enjoy the millennial kingdom. Therefore, Mede taught a two-stage return of Christ, but not with the tribulation lodged in the middle of two advents as in John Nelson Darby’s pretribulationism.

Mede’s interval between the rapture and the second coming is likely only hours or days, but not years as required by a pretribulationist viewpoint. The 2 Peter 3:10 conflagration is a final destruction of the heavens and earth in preparation for the millennium within Mede’s system.² Dispensationalists usually place 2 Peter 3:10 at the end of the millennium as a transition into the eternal state.

¹ Joseph Mede, “Mr. Mede’s Answer to the Tenth Quaere, about the 1000 years Regnum Sanctorum,” in *The Works of Joseph Mede, B. D. in Five Books*, 4th ed. (London: Roger Norton, 1677), p. 776.

² The 2 Peter 3:10 conflagration was important enough to Mede that he wrote an entire pamphlet on the topic. Joseph Mede, *A Paraphrase and Exposition of the Prophecies of Saint Peter, Concerning the day of Christs second Coming, Described in the third Chapter of his second Epistle. As Also, How the Conflagration, or Destruction of the World by fire, (whereof Saint Peter speaks) and especially of the Heavens, is to be understood*. (London: R. Bishop, 1642). This essay is included in *The Works of Joseph Mede*, pp. 609–19. For analysis of

PETER JURIEU

Pretribulationist Paul Benware has made the following claims about other pre-Darby pre-trib rapturists:

As early as 1687, Peter Jurieu, in his book *Approaching Deliverance of the Church* (1687), taught that Christ would come in the air to rapture the saints and return to heaven before the battle of Armageddon. He spoke of a secret Rapture prior to His coming in glory and judgment at Armageddon. . . . It is clear that these men believed that this coming will precede Christ's descent to the earth and the time of judgment. The purpose was to preserve believers from the time of judgment.³

The problem with claiming Jurieu as a pretribulationist is when one looks at the original documents Benware refers to for support from Grant Jeffrey,⁴ they do not mention a “secret” rapture and the judgment mentioned is the second coming, not the tribulation—contra Jeffrey. Jurieu actually says,

And St. John saith, that *the Saints shall reign with Christ a thousand years*. I would not be too confident, that this ought to be understood of *a visible descent and abode of Christ upon earth*; yea, I do not believe it probable. But to me it seems very Evident, that *this Reign shall begin with some miraculous appearance of our Lord in his Glory*. After which he shall go back to Heaven, and from thence govern this *victorious Church*. Mr. J. Mede, and others after him, would make this reign of Christ for a thousand years.⁵

Jeffrey may have been confused by Jerieu’s statement that Christ would return to heaven after His coming to the earth. This is not a pre-trib rapture statement in that context! Instead it is the commonly held view by historicist premillennialists of the day as championed by Mede. Mede held that Christ would return to earth, then rapture and resurrect believers, but during the millennium Christ would reign from heaven, ruling the world through the church on earth.⁶ This is not a pre-trib rapture but a two-stage second coming where believers are raptured into the air at the second coming of Christ in order to miss the conflagration of judgment that will take place on the unbelieving world.

Jeffery Jue says that, “Jurieu was a committed millenarian, heavily influenced by Mede.”⁷ Jue notes: “Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz observed that Jurieu was basically

Mede’s conflagration views see Jeffrey K. Jue, *Heaven Upon Earth: Joseph Mede (1586–1638) and the Legacy of Millenarianism* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2006), pp. 122–25.

³ Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach*, Revised and Expanded (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006), p. 247.

⁴ Grant R. Jeffrey, *Apocalypse: The Coming Judgment of The Nations* (Toronto: Frontier Research Publications, 1992), pp. 93–4.

⁵ (spelling modernized) Peter Jurieu, *The Accomplishment of the Scripture Prophecies, or the Approaching Deliverance of the Church* (London: No Publisher, 1787), pp. 381–2.

⁶ Jue, *Heaven Upon Earth*, p. 99. For this view Jue cites *The Works of Joseph Mede*, pp. 603–4.

⁷ Jue, *Heaven Upon Earth*, p. 168.

reproducing Mede's interpretations."⁸ Neither Mede nor Jurieu taught any form of pretribulationism.

SOME OTHERS

The pre-conflagration, two-stage second coming view has been widely held during the dominance of historicist premillennialism—from Mede to Elliot. Historicism was the dominate Protestant view of prophecy from about 1575 until about 1875. John Gill (1697–1771) a historicist premillennialist taught Mede's pre-conflagration, two-stage return of Christ as follows:

The effects of Christ's second coming, and personal appearance, are many; . . . the burning of the world, and making new heavens and a new earth, and the reign of Christ there with his saints a thousand years; and then the general judgment: . . . And to begin with the universal conflagration; which is strongly and fully express by the apostle Peter, 2 epist. iii. 10, 12; . . . which is to be understood of the burning of the whole sublunary and visible world; signified by the heavens and the earth, taken in a literal, and not in a figurative sense.⁹

Like Mede, Gill teaches that the 2 Peter 3, conflagration precedes the millennium while believers are protected. He describes what will happen to the righteous during the conflagration.

Not one wicked man will escape the conflagration, all will be burnt in it, yet the wicked only; for the righteous dead, will be caught up together into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and will be carried up far enough to be out of the reach of the devouring flames; and these are they who are meant by such as fear the Lord, to whom *the sun of righteousness shall arise*.¹⁰

Gill describes the raptured saints hovering in the air while the earth is cleansed during the conflagration.

The place whither he shall come, is the earth: . . . though he shall not descend upon it at once; when he appears from the third heaven, he shall descend into the air, and there stay some time, until the dead saints are raised, and the living ones changed; and both are brought unto him there; and till the new earth is made and prepared for him and them; when he and they will come down from heaven to earth, and they shall reign with him on it a thousand years.¹¹

The living saints then on earth, who will be changed, shall be caught up, together into the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and shall be carried up high enough, and be with him out of reach of this fire.¹²

⁸ Jue, *Heaven Upon Earth*, p. 239.

⁹ John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: or A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures*, 2 vols. (London: Thomas Tegg, 1839), vol. II, p. 243.

¹⁰ Gill, *Complete Body of Doctrine*, vol. II, p. 252.

¹¹ Gill, *Complete Body of Doctrine*, vol. II, p. 237.

¹² Gill, *Complete Body of Doctrine*, vol. II, p. 255.

Even E. B. Elliot (1793–1875), the greatest of all historicists commentators continued Mede’s pre-conflagration view of the second coming. Mede spoke of “saving alive a remnant now again out of the deluge of fire.”¹³

CONCLUSION

While not all premillennial historicists held to Mede’s pre-conflagration view, it appears to have lasted about as long as Protestant premillennial historicism held a dominate sway among Evangelicals. Immanuel Lacunza¹⁴ and Edward Irving’s (1792–1834) views of the rapture appear to me to fit into the pre-conflagration, two-stage second advent category found within the dominate historicist interpretive system of their day.

¹³ E. B. Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticæ; or A Commentary On The Apocalypse, Critical and Historical*, the 5th ed., (London: Seeleys, 1862), vol. IV, pp. 192–3.

¹⁴ Juan Josafat Ben-Ezra, *The Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, Translated from the Spanish, with a Preliminary Discourse, by Edward Irving, 2 vols. (London: Seeley and Son, 1827), vol. I, pp. 99–105.