

I. What is the Rapture?

- A. The term “Rapture,” describes what happens to the saints worldwide when Jesus appears in the sky at His second coming. The latin word translated “caught up” is “rapio” and is where we get the word rapture. (1 Thes. 4:16-17)
- B. In many circles, the subject of the end times has mostly been reduced to the doctrine of the rapture since many believe that this event takes place well before the judgment events we have been studying in this Revelation series. If the church is not here during those events then the study of those events seems unimportant.
- C. Almost Everyone agrees that the Rapture will happen one day in our future. The big question that has been debated for the last 100 years is: when will the rapture take place? All the adherents of different positions in timing each believe their position is Biblical. These differences of understanding should not create dividing lines of Christian fellowship.

II. Understanding the Debate

- A. There is almost a universal conviction among scholars that the final week of Daniel’s prophecy of weeks is the time frame that concludes this age. In other words, this age as we know it will end after a unique seven-year period of time. The discussion concerning the rapture involves discerning at what point before, during, or after this seven years the rapture occurs. (Dan. 9:24-27)
- B. Primary timing views – There are 2 primary views concerning the timing of the rapture according to the combined scriptures regarding the end of this age.
 - 1. Pre-tribulation – Views the rapture as occurring before the final seven years proceeding Jesus’ return to the earth. This view is also referred to as the “secret rapture” or “pre-wrath” view and became widely popular through the fictional book series “Left Behind”.
 - 2. Post-tribulation – Views the rapture as occurring at the end of the final seven years at Jesus’s to the earth.
- C. Let’s look at the 3 primary verses that are used in the New Testament to describe this event and the circumstances surrounding it.

*“**Immediately after the tribulation** of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, **and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven** with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a **great sound of a trumpet**, and **they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.**” (Mt. 24:29-31)*

*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. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thes. 4:15-18)*

*Behold, I tell you a mystery: **We shall not all sleep**, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, **at the last trumpet**. For the trumpet will sound, **and the dead will be raised** incorruptible, **and we shall be changed**.(1 Cor. 15:51-52)*

- A. Jesus describes His second coming as a singular event occurring after the tribulation. At no point in His teaching ministry does he ever reference an additional return. There are many, however, who believe that (1 Thes. 4:15-18) should be understood as a momentary return (secret rapture) for the purpose of rapturing the church. Once the church is raptured they go back up into heaven and await the full second coming.
- B. The similarities of these passages are striking and I believe very clearly all refer to the same event. Nowhere do the scriptures delineate between two different second coming events. It is the core conviction of this leadership team that all scriptures on the theme of the second coming point to one event, which occurs after the tribulation and not any point before it.

III. Apologetic Response to Pre-tribulation Rapture Position

- A. Now that we have established the position of our leadership team on this topic it behooves us to make some clear apologetic statements concerning some of the main belief systems that exist around the popular pre-tribulation rapture view. As I myself have been a proponent of the post-tribulation view for quite a few years I am very familiar with the theological constructs in which this view finds its foundations.

1. The Church is not appointed to Wrath – The strongest argument I have heard from those who hold a pre-tribulation view is that the church must be raptured before the Tribulation because Christians are not appointed to wrath. The pretribulation view holds that the present age is characterized by grace and that the Tribulation is characterized by wrath, therefore, the Church cannot be here during the Tribulation. This line of thinking is known as the “Doctrine of Comfort.” (1 Thes. 5:9; Rom. 5:9)
 - a) Scripture is clear that the saints are not subjected to the wrath or judgments of God. The clear biblical precedent concerning God’s wrath against unrighteousness is that it is poured out upon the unrighteous. The reason why He reveals his wrath is to destroy and eradicate sin and darkness from the planet. (Rom. 1:18; Eph. 5:9; Rev. 9:21)
 - b) The difference of view generally concerns God’s method of delivering His people from being effected by the wrath He is bringing against wickedness. The biblical precedence of how He does this through divine protection or redirection, not by removing people from earth. (Gen. 19:15-16; Ex. 8:22-23; Josh. 6:17; Isa. 26:20-21; Rev. 7:2-3, 12:6-14, 18:4)
 - c) Many who hold the pre-tribulation view point to (Rev. 3:10) as a proof-text for the theory that Christians will be delivered from the Tribulation through the rapture.

Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. – Rev. 3:10

- d) Across the board scholars affirm that the letters to the seven churches were written to real historical churches in AD 70 and that Jesus was addressing their current issues and in doing so also speaking of end time realities. If this passage is speaking about the rapture then Jesus would have caught up the Philadelphians to keep them from trial. The same exact language is used by Jesus to speak of spiritual preservation in (Jhn 17:15).
- e) Finally in regards to tribulation, believers are never promised that they will not experience tribulation, but rather they are promised they will experience it. (Mat. 24:9; Jn 16:33; Acts. 14:22; 2 Cor. 2:3-4; 1 Thes. 3:3-4; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:12)

2. Another common argument for the pretribulation rapture position is by pointing out the word “Church”. This word is used extensively in (Rev. 2-3) however, after John is called up to heaven (Rev. 4:1) the word “saints” is used and you never see the word church again. Their conclusion then is that the Church must not be here and that the saints that are written about are a new group of believers who were saved during the Tribulation but are not members of the Church.
 - a) If the lack of the term “church,” is proof that the church is not present then doesn’t it stand to reason that the church cannot be in heaven either since the word “church” is not used there either but rather the word “saints” is used?
 - b) If we apply the same rule to the rest of the NT the word “church” is not used in 6 other books in the NT but rather the word “saints” is used. Even more troubling to this logic is the word “church” is also missing from those passages directly dealing with the rapture when Christians see Jesus again (Jn. 14:1; 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thes. 4-5).
3. He comes like a thief – The final common argument for the pre-tribulation rapture or “secret rapture” is that the return of Jesus to the earth is likened to a thief. This argument holds very little weight when actually looking at the passages referring to Him coming as a thief. These passages make it clear that He will come upon unbelievers unexpectedly like a thief, the watchful church, however, will not be surprised at His coming. (Mat. 24:36-44; 1 Thes. 5:1-6; 1 Pet. 3:1-13)

IV. Final Thoughts

- A. I believe that there is a danger in the pre-tribulation view that can leave individuals who hold this view open to offense at God’s leadership if in fact they find themselves in tribulation. (Mat. 13:21, 24:10)
- B. That being said, your view of the timing of the rapture does not fall into the category of essential doctrine and is not a grounds for breaking fellowship and should not hinder unity. I highly respect many in the body of Christ who hold to a pre-tribulation rapture view and consider them to be brothers and co-laborers in the kingdom. In no way does our differing views on the rapture hinder our deep love and respect for one another.