

THE RAPTURE . . . FACT OR FICTION?

Undoubtedly one of the most important truths we hold to as Christians is the teaching of the **rapture**. And although this particular word does not appear anywhere in Scripture, the event itself is clearly prophesied all throughout the New Testament. (Romans 8:11; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; Ephesians 1:13-14; Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 3:1-4; 1 John 3:1-3) The Bible plainly teaches that one day very soon, the trumpet shall sound and the dead in Christ shall arise. Then immediately after, those Believers who are alive shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. (1 Corinthians 15:50-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) The debate over the fact of the rapture taking place some day should be a short one at best. However, we had better take a closer look at this doctrine just the same. Because the real question that needs to be asked is not as to whether or not the rapture will ever happen, but rather **when** will it happen in relation to the Tribulation. And if we ultimately discover that we have been wrong, we had better be willing to admit it! The following study contains some common arguments that most of us have used to prove that a pre-Tribulation rapture could happen at any moment. They will be countered with some uncommon answers from the pages of God's Word, which will hopefully provide the reader with some very **inescapable** conclusions!

COMMON ARGUMENTS

REVELATION 4:1-2	JEREMIAH 30:7	1 THESSALONIANS 5:9	2 THESSALONIANS 2:7-8	MATTHEW 24:29-31
<p>One of the most common ways to support the teaching of a pre-Tribulation rapture is by means of typology. The story of Enoch is used by many to prove somehow, that his translation out of this world alive is a picture of the rapture of the Church. (Hebrews 11:5) Now it is true that the deluge of Genesis 6-8 was indeed a picture of the 2nd Coming of Christ, and was prophesied by Enoch 600 years earlier. (Jude 14-15) However, to make the assumption that this picture is a translation of the Church before the Tribulation, is quite a leap of faith in itself! Does this mean that the rapture will occur 600 years before the 2nd Coming? The book of Revelation is also used to paint a similar picture of the rapture. Chapters 2 and 3 are seen by many to teach a prophetic overview of Church history. And afterwards in chapter 4:1-2, John is said to picture the rapture of the Church, as he is called up to heaven with a sound like a trumpet by the Spirit of God, before he receives the Revelation of the end times. And since the word Church is not mentioned in Revelation 4-19, the conclusion is drawn that Christians are captured before the Tribulation begins. However, the only problem with this reasoning is that it is based solely upon the use of typology. Typology does have its place in the teaching of the Scriptures. Never-the-less, it should not ever serve as the foundation for our belief in relation to any doctrine. In this instance, the opposite conclusion could be reached by someone with the same interpretation of Chapters 2 and 3. Because within these chapters lie a number of Tribulation references. (Revelation 2:5, 7, 10, 16, 22, 25-26; 3:3, 5, 10-11, 20) Why does this not prove that the Church actually does go through the majority of the Tribulation?</p>	<p>Another common argument made in the attempt to prove that the Church cannot go through the Tribulation is that this seven-year period is set aside primarily for the restoration of Israel. (Jeremiah 30:6-9) It is true that the Lord will be dealing with the remnant of His people during the time of Tribulation in an incredible way. (Ezekiel 20:33-38; Daniel 9:24-27; Joel 2:28-32; Romans 9:27-28; Hebrews 8:10-12) However, this does not mean that God cannot be working on someone else simultaneously. During the book of Acts we can see where the Lord was dealing with His people during a similar period of transition. He was also at the same time, reaching out to the Gentile nations of that day. The twelve apostles were stationed at Jerusalem and maintained a consistent witness to the generation of Hebrews who were transitioning out of the Old Testament time period. But because these men and women were accountable to the message of the Kingdom, which began during the ministry of John the Baptist, they were dealt with in a slightly different manner. (Acts 2:38; 8:12-17; 19:1-7; 22:16) Then after several years, the apostle Paul was appointed his ministry of reaching the Gentiles and the younger Hebrew generation who had not been confronted with the message of the Kingdom. (Galatians 2:7-9) In the future during the great Tribulation, anyone who is converted will still be added to the Church. Many of those who are already saved before the Tribulation begins, will probably be the first ones to be martyred by the Antichrist. After the rapture, any Gentile who gets his heart right with God (Revelation 14:6-7) will have to survive until the 2nd Coming of Christ. These are the sheep nations referred to by the Lord in Matthew 25:31-40, and they enter the Millennial Kingdom alive. (Zechariah 14:16-18) At the same time, the remnant of Israel that had been blinded by the Lord, gets saved and also enters into the Kingdom alive. (Romans 11:25-27; Zechariah 14:1-5)</p>	<p>Probably the most frequently used verse in the Bible to prove a pre-Tribulation rapture is 1 Thessalonians 5:9. "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." The implication here is that this entire seven-year period of Tribulation is known as a time of great wrath; and the Lord does not want His Church to go through it. However, this argument is quickly put to rest when we simply compare Scripture with Scripture. First of all, the first 3 1/2 years of Daniel's 70th week (Daniel 9:27) is technically never referred to in the Bible as a time of Tribulation. And it is most definitely not ever referred to as a time of wrath. Hell on the other hand, is quite often in the Bible said to be a place of great wrath. (Romans 5:9-10) And as Paul wrote to the Thessalonians earlier in this same epistle, we have already been delivered from it! (1 Thessalonians 1:10) It makes a whole lot more sense that this is what he was referring to in chapter 5, where he contrasts the obtaining of the salvation of our bodies with the appointment of judgment and wrath that awaits the bodies of unbelievers. (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10; Revelation 14:9-11) But even if Paul were talking about a time of wrath in this life, he most likely would have been referring to the very last portion of the great Tribulation. Because it is here where the viols of God's wrath will be poured out one day upon the Christ-rejecting world. (Revelation 16:1-21) And if this indeed was what the apostle had in mind, then it would actually again prove an end of the Tribulation rapture. Because the Lord will not pour out His final judgment of wrath until after the Tribulation Saints have been translated to the throne of God! (Revelation 15:1-4, 7-8)</p>	<p>Another passage used to teach the Church's great escape from this 7-year period of history is 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8. "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed..." The standard interpretation here results from an assumption that the one who is letting and eventually taken out of the way is the Holy Ghost. And then after He is taken, the Antichrist is to be revealed. However, this is not what Paul was saying at all. The day of Christ has already been defined in the book of Philippians as the rapture of Believers and the Judgment Seat of Christ. (Philippians 1:6, 10; 2:16; 3:20-21) And that day cannot take place until after the Antichrist is revealed, halfway through Daniel's 70th week. (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15) This day of Christ is defined also in the context as our gathering together unto Him. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3) Believers are warned by the apostle not to allow anybody to deceive them into thinking that that day (the rapture) is at hand. But that is exactly what has happened to the vast majority of Christians today. They have allowed books, movies, friends, family, and even their own Pastors to convince them that at any moment the Holy Ghost and His Church could be taken out of the way. And in doing so, they have actually allowed the Devil to deceive them into thinking that they will not have to go through this horrible time in history. For it is actually the Devil himself who is allowing the mystery of iniquity to work, and shielding the identity of the man of sin. But once Satan is taken out of the way halfway through the Tribulation (Revelation 12:7-9) then his Antichrist will finally be revealed. (Revelation 9:1-3, 11; 17:8) The reason the apostle Paul took the time to warn the Church about this is because he knew it would still be here to see this taking place. (2 Thessalonians 2:6)</p>	<p>Matthew 24:29-31 is yet another passage of Scripture used by well-meaning Believers to somehow support a pre-Tribulation rapture of Christians. But if left within its context, there is absolutely no way in the world that anyone could come to this conclusion! Jesus said that one day all the tribes of the earth shall mourn, and shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds. And at this time, "He shall send his angels with a sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." All of this sounds good until one glances back at verse 29. Because the particular event that the Lord just prophesied cannot take place until immediately after the Tribulation of those days! Knowing this is true, some people will actually take this passage and attempt to use it to support the teaching of another rapture of Believers who turn to the Lord specifically during the Tribulation period. They will usually cite 1 Corinthians 15:22-24 and say that this is the third and final harvest of Believers which is to take place one day at the end of the Tribulation. The only problem with this interpretation, is that it creates still another issue that cannot be reconciled within this particular passage. Paul indeed is teaching in 1 Corinthians 15 about an order to the resurrection of Saints throughout the ages. First of all he mentions the fact that when the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead, He brought all of the Old Testament Saints with Him, and took them up to heaven. (Matthew 27:51-53; Ephesians 4:8-10) Secondly, Paul states that there will be some Saints made alive at Christ's coming one day. But this cannot be referring to a pre-Tribulation rapture, because if it does, then the 3rd and final harvest of Saints must take place at the end of the Tribulation. However, this would not make sense because Paul goes on to say in verses 25-28 that the end he is referring to is the end of the Millennium. Because the Lord Jesus Christ does not deliver the Kingdom back to the Father until after He has reigned for 1,000 years. (Revelation 20:1-10) Again, if we simply allow the Scriptures to interpret themselves, we will not find a pre-Tribulation rapture anywhere in Matthew 24, or in 1 Corinthians 15.</p>

UNCOMMON ANSWERS

As a rule, nobody in their right mind likes to be wrong. And Bible-believing Christians are no exception to this rule. But if we are honest with ourselves, it would not be the first time we have failed to be correct about some significant doctrinal issue. However, the implications of going through this time of Tribulation make it even harder for us to accept the possibility that we have previously been mistaken. This is why most discussion on this particular topic becomes very emotional and heated. But we had better get beyond our prideful and petty attitudes and get back into the Scriptures to see exactly what God has to say. The Bible never says anywhere that we are supposed to be taken off this planet **before** Daniel's 70th week begins. However, it does teach plainly that we are actually called to suffer tribulation in this world. (John 16:33; Acts 14:21-22; 2 Timothy 3:10-12; Hebrews 11:35-38) Paul's prayer for the Believers at Thessalonica was that God would count them worthy of this calling-not that they would escape it! (1 Thessalonians 2:10-15; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-11) This is why he told them before it ever happened, so that they would not be deceived. (1 Thessalonians 3:1-4) Why should we think that God's holy calling to the suffering of tribulation is any less worthy of a calling for those of us today? In fact, the thought of it should cause us to greatly rejoice! (Acts 5:40-42) The **Coming of the Lord** is a phrase used by Paul to describe the rapture of Christians (1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23) and the Lord's glorious return to this earth. (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10) **That day** is the day when we finally get to rest in our glorified bodies; and it should not overtake us as a **thief** if we are watching. (Matthew 24:36-44; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4; Revelation 3:3-5; 16:12-16) However, **that day** cannot come until after there is a great falling away of professing Believers, and the Antichrist is revealed. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4) And it is a day that we should long for as did all Believers of old. (James 5:7-8; 2 Peter 3:10-12; Jude 24; Revelation 22:20) But would we still want it to come in our lifetime if we thought that we had to first endure the fiery trials of the Tribulation? Would we be willing to give our lives so that others might learn from our sufferings and be saved, if our beloved country does in fact become ground zero for the Antichrist's reign of terror one day? (Revelation 2:10-11; 6:9-11; 7:13-15; 13:7-10, 15; 14:12-13; 20:4) Because as the 144,000 Hebrew witnesses go untouched as they preach salvation to those people who have never heard the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12) someone is going to have to pay the price. Someone is going to have to stand up and be willing to die for what they believe; and that someone may be **you!** Some people after reading this study may begin to worry about what they would do if they were faced with the choice of either taking the mark of the beast, or dying a horrific death. But as the Lord Himself said in Matthew 24:23-26, if they are truly His, it will not be possible for them to be deceived. This world is getting ready to enter into one of the most exciting times of history! We should not ask to escape it but rather pray to the Lord His will to be done and that He would count us worthy of this calling to suffer tribulation. God's grace will be more than sufficient, and it will also be more than available to all Christians who need it in that day.

PRE-TRIB?

POST-TRIB?

MID-TRIB?