

A STUDY OF, "THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH"

During this study we will attempt to answer three basic questions.

- 1) What is the Rapture of the church?
- 2) How can we know that the Rapture will really happen?
- 3) How do we explain the biblical concept known as the Rapture to others?

SECTION 1)

What is "THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH"?

It is the fulfillment of the promise made by Christ, to return to earth and take his church to heaven.

We can know that this is a true statement because Christ said; "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." (John 14:1-3)

However, when we try to explain this issue with others their first question is, is the word "RAPTURE" really in our English bibles? The answer is NO. Then why do we believe in the rapture if the word "RAPTURE" is not even in our English bibles? Because the original text were all written in either Greek or Latin and when these original texts were translated into English the word rapture was the equivalent to the English word of the original Greek or Latin word.

- 1) In the Greek translations it meant, "we shall be caught away" or "taken away"
- 2) In the Latin translations it meant, "to catch up" or "take away"
- 3) In English and to Christians around the world it means that Christ will reach down from the clouds, and physically take his church off of this earth to heaven and all this will occur in a split second (Time to be determined by God).

When did the translation of Greek to Latin to English begin, who wrote the translation and how did this process take place?

Our English word “rapture”, as with so many English terms, was derived from Latin. Here’s how it happened:

In the fourth century AD, the great scholar Jerome translated the New Testament from the original Greek language to Latin. His translation is known as the Vulgate. In 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Jerome rendered the Greek word (harpazo) into Latin with the word (raeptius). The Latin word was translated as “to seize, snatch, or seize away.” This was eventually brought over to English as RAPTURE. (Ref.1)

The RAPTURE is referenced many times in the New Testament; however, the first three passages listed below provide the most complete look at this concept with passages 4&5 listed as additional support.

- 1) John 14: 1-3, as stated above
- 2) 1 Corinthians 15:50-57, “I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory”.
- 3) 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18, “Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the

Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore, encourage each other with these words."

- 4) Romans 5:9, "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him"
- 5) 1 Thessalonians 5:9, "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ"

Many people today ask the question, is the Rapture of the saints/church and the Second coming of Christ one event or two? The simple answer is there were two events. The question is how does scripture defines or determines these two events.

A comparison of the rapture (1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 with the glorious appearing (Matthew 24-25) reveals at least eight significant differences. These differences demand that the rapture occur at a significantly different time from Christ's glorious appearing:

- 1) At the rapture, Christ comes in the air and returns to heaven, (1 Thessalonians 4:17). → At the glorious appearing, Christ comes to dwell and reign, (Matthew 25:31-32).
- 2) At the rapture, Christ gathers his own, (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). → At the glorious appearing, angels gather the elect, (Matthew 24:31).
- 3) At the rapture, Christ comes to reward, (1 Thessalonians 4:17). → At the glorious appearing, Christ comes to judge, (Matthew 25: 31-46).
- 4) At the rapture, resurrection is prominent, (1 Thessalonians 4:15-16). → At the glorious appearing, resurrection is not mentioned.

- 5) At the rapture, believers depart the earth, (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). → At the glorious appearing, unbelievers are taken away from the earth, (Matthew 24:37-41).
- 6) At the rapture, unbelievers remain on earth. → At the glorious appearing, believers remain on earth, (Matthew 25:34).
- 7) Christ's kingdom on earth is not mentioned at the rapture. → At the glorious appearing, Christ has come to set up his kingdom on earth, (Matthew 25:31&34).
- 8) At the rapture, believers will receive glorified bodies, (1 Corinthians 15:51-57). → At the glorious appearing, survivors will not receive glorified bodies. (Ref.2)

Based on the above list of significant differences it would appear the Rapture and the glorious Appearing of Christ are two separate events.

Another issue which needs to be discussed, as it relates to whether these two events are one or two events, is that God is a God of logic and order, using creation as an example. Therefore, because that God is a God of logic, it would seem unreasonable to believe that these two events would be combined into one event, given Christ would need to return to the earth "to catch up" or "snatch up" to heaven his bride, the Christian church. Remember this event has been in the making for thousands of years; another way of describing the event would be the most anticipated event for the Christian church, since Christ first appeared on planet earth, the largest wedding and wedding party the universe has ever seen and then Christ would return to earth, and he would be able to end the tribulation and begin the millennium -- all in a split second. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe and the bible validates the fact that the Rapture and the Glorious Appearing are two separate events.

What else does the Bible say about the Rapture in terms of what events or actions are triggered by the Rapture of God's saints/ the church?

- 1) Through this process Christ returns to the earth to claim his Bride, the church. (John 14:1-3, Rev. 19:7-9)

- 2) Through this process the Bride/church is now in heaven and the wedding between Christ and the church can now take place and the wedding party can now begin. (Rev. 19:7-9)
- 3) The removal of God's saints/ the church and their protector, the Holy Spirit, paves the way for the beginning of the Tribulations and the Great Tribulations, seven years in total, three & one half years each. This is a point in time in which God will make his presence known and felt by every person remaining on the face of the earth, including Satan.
- 4) Because of this event Satan, his antichrist, and false prophet are allowed to make their way on to the scene on planet earth.
- 5) Because of this event God will now continue his direct dealings with his chosen people the Jews and their land, Israel. The 70th week of Daniel's prophesy will begin with the Rapture.
- 6) Because of this event the only two things separate every man who has ever lived from the eternity of his choosing, Heaven or Hell, one is the 7 years of Tribulation on planet earth followed by the 1000 years of Christ's direct rule on the physical plant earth as we know it.

SECTION 2)

There are many views or interpretations of the rapture being taught today in churches and on the internet. Listed below are the five most discussed of these views/opinions.

- 1) PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE → The rapture will occur before the Tribulation period begins.
 - A) The basis for this assumption is as follows: The New Testament term for church is used 19 times in Revelations 1-3, which deals with the historical church of the first century. However, Revelations uses the New Testament term for church only once more—at the very end, in 22:16, where John returns to addressing the first-century church. Most interesting is the fact that nowhere during the Tribulation period is the term church used in reference to believers on earth.

John's shift from his detailed instructions for the church to his absolute silence about the church for many chapters is remarkable and totally unexpected if in fact the church continues into the Tribulation. If the church were to experience the Tribulation (the seventieth week of Daniel as described in Daniel chapter 9), then surely the most detailed study of Tribulation events would include instructions for the church. However, it does not. The only explanation for this frequent mentioning of the church in Revelation 1-3 and total absence of the church on earth until 22:16 is a pre-tribulation rapture, which will relocate the church from earth to heaven prior to the tribulation.

B) Moreover, in Rev. 3:10 Christ through John is speaking to the church of Philadelphia, the church of brotherly love and the mission minded church, "Since you have kept my commands to endure patiently, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth."

C) The "Blessed Hope Concept" or the return of Christ for his church is the Greatest Hope of every Christian. It is one of the key truths that every Christian believes in, because if this is not true then Christ would be a liar based on John 14:1-3.

The pre-tribulation view is that if we must go through the tribulation period before Jesus comes for his church, Jesus would need to change his wording in John 14:1 from "Do not let you heart be troubled" to "let your heart be troubled because you are going to go through the worst time the earth has ever seen or will ever see, before I come again". People who hold this view also point to 1 Thessalonians 1:10 as another promise that believers/ the church will not have to go through the tribulations, "--and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead- Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath", 1 Thessalonians 1:10. It should also be noted that one of the primary topics of 1 Thessalonians is the second coming of Christ.

D) This group also believes that Rev. 4:1-2 is in fact symbolic for the Church being removed from plant earth or "The Rapture". Rev.4:1-

2,"After this I looked, and there before me was a door open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.' At once I was in the spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it." The primary point that makes this view believable is that John has just been addressing the seven churches in Rev. 2-3; John, representing the church is now taken up to heaven to witness the Tribulation events from heaven. The church is not mentioned again until Rev.19:7,"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready." The bride being referred to here is the church, which would now be in heaven. Based on this and therefore that there is no other mention of how the church gets to heaven or mentioned in Rev. 3:22-19:6, this view assumes that the church has been there through the Tribulation period. The primary weakness of this point is that you could also assume that there is no direct mention of how the church got to heaven; you could assume that they just arrived and had in fact gone through the entire Tribulation on earth. However, given the order in which Revelations is written and all of the other verses indicating that the church is in heaven during the Tribulation period, it does not appear that this weakness is major. Take note that all scripture is logical and should be interpreted with other scripture.

It also needs to be made clear that the pre-tribulation view of the rapture is heavily based on the belief that the second coming is in fact two events. The first of which would be the rapture, when Christ would meet his church in the clouds and take it back to heaven for a seven year wedding party and, second when Christ would then return to earth with his bride, the church, for his millennial reign. The key to this belief is found in Titus 2:12-13, "Live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." They believe this indicates a fact that there are two visitations by Christ but incorrectly counted as one event, the blessed hope/rapture and the glorious appearing/ Christ physical return to planet earth. Remember Christ first visitation to earth also had two events; Christ's birth was the first and his resurrection was

the second and many people today count these as one event even though we have the New Testament that tells us they were two distinct events. There are other scripture verses supporting this view but these are the primary ones.

2) MID-TRIBULATION RAPTURE → The rapture will occur in the middle of the tribulations. The tribulation is 7 years or 84 months in length, therefore the rapture will happen after the first 42 months but before the second 42 month period.

There are three primary points upon which the mid-tribulation Rapture assumption is based.

- 1) Most of the people who adhere to this view believe that the rapture occurs in Rev. 11:11-12. They believe that the two witnesses described in that chapter symbolize the witnessing church during the first half of the tribulation. The martyrdom of the witnesses, who are then resurrected and taken to heaven, symbolizes the rapture passage. However, it needs to be noted that within this group there are many others who believe that the rapture event takes place @ Rev.6:12-15, or @ Rev.11:15-17, or @ Rev.14:1-4. The fact that there is no conclusive agreement about this primary point weakens the mid-tribulation assumption.
- 2) They equate the blowing of the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15 with the last trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52. Noting that the seventh trumpet is the final trumpet, they equate the two events as the same event, thus locating the rapture in the middle of the tribulation.
- 3) They limit the time of wrath to three-and-a half years based on Dan. 7:25, “He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the law. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.”

There are at least five weak points in mid-tribulation assumption.

- 1) The people who adhere to this point of view cannot agree among themselves where the rapture will occur in scripture as stated in point 1 above.
- 2) It does not appear the blowing of the seventh trumpet is the same as the trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52, because they believe the rapture in Rev.11:12 happen before the blowing of the seventh trumpet in Rev. 11:15 by three verses. Simply put, the timing is wrong.
- 3) By segmenting the tribulation into two parts and then placing the rapture in the middle, we would be destroying the concept of, "the imminent return of Christ". This would mean that everyone would know the exact day of Christ's return, which Matthew 24:36 says is not possible, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the son, but only the Father."
- 4) The way that this group has interpreted Rev. 11 requires that this portion of scripture would need to be spiritualized rather than taken literally and there does not appear to be any reason for this as this scripture is very clear about what is happening during this time period.
- 5) If this group believes that God would make such promises as he made in John 14:1, "do not let your heart be troubled" and 1 Thessalonians 1:10, "Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath", and Rev. 3:10, "I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.", then it does not appear that they fully understand the first half or 42 months of the tribulations that when the fourth seal, Rev.6:7-8, is opened one fourth or 25% of all the people and living creatures on the earth will die. Also, during the first half or 42 months with the blowing of the sixth trumpet, Rev. 9:13, another one third of the remaining people will die, which is really 1/3 of the remaining 3/4 left after the fourth seal was opened. This equates to one half of the worlds population will die in the first half or 42 months of the tribulations. Again, this does not sound like the promises made by Jesus, as listed above. →(John 14:1 ; 1 Thessalonians 1:10 ; Rev. 3:10) This is also the same time period

when many people on the earth will turn to God and be saved. However, during this same time period many Christians will be martyred (Rev.7: 9-17). Again, it would appear this time period does not sound like one in which Christ promised his church protection from God's wrath.

3) POST TRIBULATION RAPTURE → The rapture will occur at the end of the tribulation, right before the second coming of Christ back to planet earth. The cornerstone of their view is:

Matt. 24:29-31, "Immediately after the distress of those days, the sun will be darkened, and moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken'. At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

The biggest difference between this interpretation and all of the other interpretations about the rapture, is that they believe that the church will go through the entire tribulation period before being caught up to heaven, which means that in their interpretation of the second coming of Christ there would only be one single event. Therefore, the rapture and Christ's return to end the tribulations and start the millennium would be one event, not two separate events. Note, in the other interpretations there is two events, rapture and second coming separated by some time period not greater than seven years.

This view is in serious conflict with all of the other interpretations in at least one of the following areas;

- 1) Ignores the scriptural promise of escape from the wrath of the tribulation; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15: 50-57.
- 2) It would minimize the importance of the rapture; John 14: 1-3.
- 3) It would allow no time for the Judgment Seat of Christ and the marriage supper; 2 Corinthians 5:10, 1 Corinthians 4:4-5, Revelations 19:7-9.

- 4) It does not allow time for Christ to keep his promise to take believers to be with him in the fathers house; John 14: 1-3.
- 5) This view places the church on the earth during Daniel's seventieth week. The seventieth week of Daniel is dedicated to God's direct dealings with Israel and the un-godly nations of the earth. In addition, the church is not referenced in scripture as being on earth during this time period.
- 6) This view does not adequately explain why the church is the primary focus of Revelations chapters 1-3, then totally omitted in Revelations chapters 4-18, which is the period of Gods wrath or Tribulation. The church re-enters the scene in chapter 19 when Christ returns to earth to end the Tribulations and rule the earth for 1,000 years.
- 7) This view would appear to greatly diminish the concept of "The Blessed Hope" given most Christians would not look forward to going through the tribulation period. However, there are two opposing schools of thought on this. One is that God will not put more on you than you can deal with, with his help. Two concludes that the seven years of the Tribulations is the seventieth week of Daniel and as it is written only deals with Israel and the un-Godly nations of the earth.
- 8) This view would destroy the "imminence" of Christ and establish the exact time of his return, both of which is not possible per the Bible. Matt. 24: 36, 44.
- 9) This view cannot explain the eight differences listed above in the comparison between the Rapture as described in 1Corinthians 15: 50-57 & 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18 and the Glorious Appearing in Matthew 24 & 25.
- 10) This view does not adequately explain who would populate the earth during the 1000 year reign of Christ. Given their view all of the Christians would have just been resurrected, therefore, they would have a glorified body and be like the angels, not having the ability to have children, Matt. 22:30. At the end of the tribulation period all of the remaining unsaved people, who are still alive, will be brought before Christ and will bow on their knees and call him

Lord ,(see→ Rev. 19, focus on vs. 21), as well as, be judged as to their location for eternity, Matt. 25: 31-46. However, based on Rev. 20: 7-10 there would appear to be a lot of people on the earth when Satan is released at the end of the 1000 year reign of Christ on the earth, as we currently know it. Rev. 7:9; 14:6 and Matt. 24:13 tell us that many people will be saved during the Tribulation period. Many will be martyred but not all. This is the group of mortal people who will live through the 1000 year reign of Christ and marry and have children. It would appear that it is their children who will rebel at the end of the 1000 year reign of Christ and side with Satan when he is released. Ref.3

4) THE PARTIAL RAPTURE → The partial-rapture view believes in multiple Raptures of believers at the beginning of, and during, the seven year Tribulation period. The term “partial” refers to the idea that only certain Christians will be raptured at a time. The criteria for who would be Raptured first is those who will be faithful and watchful. In this view, the very faithful would be Raptured first, and then the somewhat faithful last.

This view is based on New Testament passages that stress obedience, watching and waiting for Christ, Matt. 25:1-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:6 ; Hebrews 9:28 ; 1 John 2:28.

This view is in direct conflict with the Bible in at least six places:

- 1) 1 Corinthians 15:51 says, “We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed” and 1 Thessalonians 4:14 says that when Christ comes he will bring with him all, “those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.” Therefore, this view is in direct conflict with the all inclusive words in scripture like “we” and “all” when discussing the rapture.
- 2) This view is a direct contradiction of the Bible concept, “the unity of the body of Christ” that was formed by God’s grace, 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 2:14-3:6; 4:1-6, 12-16; Colossians 3:11, 15.
- 3) This view would seem to indicate that the timing of our entrance into heaven was somehow dependent on our spiritual maturity or

readiness, in other words, our works. This cannot be as the Bible clearly states in, Eph. 2:8-9. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourself, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." Heaven cannot be obtained by works.

- 4) This view creates a kind of Protestant purgatory on earth during the time of the Tribulations. The only difference between this idea and the Catholic view is the place where it would be served.
- 5) This view seems to discriminate based on the time when a Christian is raptured, in terms of the time that specific Christians have at the wedding party. The Bible does not indicate this concept.
- 6) All of the people who adhere to this view and write about it believe they will be in the pre-tribulation rapture. This does not seem reasonable based on a normal distribution in statistics.

5) THE PRE-WRATH RAPTURE → The pre-wrath rapture view places the rapture at some point during the Tribulation period before the second coming of Christ. It is estimated to be approximately three fourths or five and a half years into the Tribulation period.

In this view the remaining time after the Rapture is known as the Great Tribulations. They reference portions of Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 as evidence that their view of the Tribulation period will be cut short by the coming of Christ to deliver the righteous by means of the Rapture, which will occur after specific events in Revelations, in particular after the sixth seal is opened, the sun is darkened, and the moon is turned to blood. Then, after the Rapture of the Church, God's seventh-seal wrath of trumpets and bowls (The Day of The Lord) will follow for the remainder of the seven years on the remaining ungodly world. This view has been popularized by Robert Van Kampen in his book THE SIGN, printed in 1992 and by Marvin Rosenthal who wrote THE PRE-WRATH RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH in 1990. This view would require that the person who is evaluating this view/concept, to laser focus in on specific portions of specific verses

within the Bible with no respect for the rest of the verse or Bible as a whole, therefore, unless more scripture can be found to support this view it would need to be rejected as non-scriptural.

SECTION 3)

THE HISTORY OF THE RAPTURE CONCEPT AND DATE SETTING FOR THE RAPTURE →

Setting the date for the return of Christ has been center stage in theological discussions within the church ever since Christ's ascension into heaven as the disciples watched, Luke 24:51 & Acts 1:9. However, the Bible clearly states that, "No one knows about the day or the hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the father" Matt. 24:36. If this statement in Matthew is true and it is because it is part of God's Holy Word, then why have people down through the ages tried to set the specific date for Christ return. The primary reason appears to be the verses in Matthew 24:32, in which Christ says or leads some people to believe, based on their interpretation of these verses that we can predict the approximate time or season. Then from this point of approximation, men add their own words and interpretations to make this passage of scripture meet their own personal needs and requirements.

Note: this sounds a lot like the history of man- he always knows more than God or he is going to help God with his plan for man.

Based on the above analysis it would appear the issue of setting dates has evolved over the ages and the question arises, "Why does man need to know the exact date"? All man really needs to know is that Christ has promised to return one day for his church, John 14:1-3. The history behind this issue goes all the way back to the original church fathers. It would appear that the primary focus of their belief/thinking was on the "imminence" of Christ's return and that the study of the rapture and the Tribulations were secondary out growths of the "imminence" issues. The obvious question would be why were they primarily focusing their thinking on the issue of, imminence?

The apparent answer is many of the original church fathers either had seen, or knew someone who had seen, or knew Christ when he was on this earth. Many, if not most of these men, thought that the period between Christ's ascension and his return was going to be a relatively short period of time, especially given the angel's words that were fresh in the minds of the first through the third century church fathers, Acts 1:9-11 but more specifically focusing on vs. 11, "Men of Galilee, they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." Therefore they did not spend a lot of time dwelling on the details of how this process was going to un-fold; they just believed it would be very soon. This thought process of "imminence" or "soon return of Christ" was the predominant thinking in the first, second, and third century church. Note: given the church of the first through third century was under constant threat of death, it would seem reasonable that men would put their hope in a "soon return of Christ". However, as usual man took God's words of hope and adjusted them to fit men's desires therefore creating something entirely different.

Again many of the early church fathers seemed to be somewhat more disinterested in the order of the events that were being discussed than we are today because they thought Christ second coming was imminent.

A few of these are listed as follows; Barnabas (ca. 100-105), Papias (ca.60-130), Justin Martyr (110-165), Irenaeus (120-202), Tertullian (145-220), Hippolytus (ca.185-236), Cyprian (200-250), and Lactantius (260-330).

Also, Expressions of "imminence" abound in the apostolic fathers. Clement of Rome (90-100), Ignatius of Antioch (98-117), The Didache (100-160), The Epistle of Barnabas (117-138), and The Shepherd of Hermas (96-150) all speak of "imminence". Their statements abound with exhortations to "watch", "wait", and "be ready" for the Lord's soon coming. Ref.2

Given there seems to be a lot of evidence that the early church fathers thought that Christ would return “soon” or “at any moment”, what does the bible say about “imminence” or even the idea of “imminence”?

- ➔ 1 Corinthians 1:7, “Therefore, you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”
- ➔ 1 Corinthians 16:22, “If anyone does not love the Lord – a curse be on him. Come, O Lord!”
- ➔ Philippians 3:20, “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ”.
- ➔ Philippians 4:5 “Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.”
- ➔ 1 Thessalonians 1:10, “And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”
- ➔ Titus 2:13, “While we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,”
- ➔ Hebrews 9:28, “So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”
- ➔ James 5; 7-9, “Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmers wait for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near. Don’t grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door.”
- ➔ 1 Peter 1:13, “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given to you when Christ is revealed.”
- ➔ Jude 1:21 “Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.”
- ➔ Revelations 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20, “I am coming soon.”
- ➔ Revelations 22:17, “The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come!” and let him who hearsay, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.”

As you can plainly see from the above scripture it would have been very easy, if not even compelling for the early Christians to think that Christ was only going to be gone for a short time and would be “returning very soon”.

Given the fact that the early church fathers seem so convinced that Christ return was imminent, what happened to change the minds of the next generation of church fathers in what seemed to be strong beliefs?

It was called the dark ages and it was a very dark time for the church.

→ Why? Because Satan entered the church in force.
→ How did this happen? It occurred when Constantine, Emperor of the Western portion of the Roman Empire, decided to make Christianity the state religion. He combined all of the pagan religions with Christianity in an effort to unite his empire. This took place during the time when Constantine was Emperor of the Western Roman Empire. He had the idea that the best way to unite the crumbling empire was to combine all of the existing religions under the banner of “Christianity”. He began this process with the Edict of Milan, in AD 313, which legalized Christianity, followed by The Council of Nicea in AD 325 in which he united Christianity with all other pagan religions within the empire. The outcome of this one decision would reduce the “Power of the Blood of Christ” in the formal/official church until God released it during the reformation. It was also the beginning of the Holy Roman Church. The period between Augustine and the Renaissance was largely dominated by “Augustine understanding of the church, and his spiritualization of the Millennium as the reign of Christ in the saints.” There were only “sporadic discussions here and there of a literal, future Millennium” making examples of pretribulationalism very rare. (Hannah, pp. 315-16) However, careful historical research has brought many long- neglected pretribulation statements to light.

Some others are as follows;

1) Ephraem of Nisbis (306-373)

His sermon, “On the Last Times, the Antichrist and the End of the World” (ca. 373) declares, “All the saints and elect of God are gathered together before the tribulation, which is to come, and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of sin.”

2) Codex Amiatinus (ca. 690-716)

This Latin manuscript from England was commissioned by Abbot Ceolfrid of the monasteries of Jarrow and Wearmouth in Northumberland. In the title to Psalm 22 (Psalm 23 in the Vulgate), the following appears: “Psalm of David, the voice of the Church after being raptured.” Though not conclusive and still in need of further study, it appears that Codex Amiatinus presents another example of pretribulational thought in the Middle Ages.

3) Brother Dolcino (d. 1307)

A recent study of the fourteenth-century text, **THE HISTORY OF BROTHER DOLCINO**, composed in 1316 by an anonymous source, reveals another important pretribulational passage. Francis Gumerlock is the individual who advocates the Brother Dolcino rapture find. Gumerlock (p. 80) wrote, “The Dolicinites held to a pre-tribulation rapture theory similar to that in modern dispensationalism.” Ref. 2

The above are just examples of the fact that even the State/Roman church was doing everything they could to suppress the rapture concept in general between the years of 400 to 1400 AD. However, as you can see there were still Godly men seeking to understand God’s Holy word, the Bible. This is not to say that there was and still is, not always a remnant of true believers.

Tracing the Rapture through Modern Times;

- 1) The concept of the Rapture was expressed by the 17th century American Puritan father and son, Increase and Cotton Mather.

They held to the idea that believers would be caught up in the air, followed by judgment on the earth, and then the millennium.

- 2) The term Rapture was used by Philip Doddridge (1738) and John Gill (1748) in their New Testament commentaries, with the idea that believers would be caught up prior to judgment on the Earth and Jesus Second Coming.
- 3) In an essay published in 1788 in Philadelphia by the Baptist Morgan Edwards articulates the concept of a pre- Tribulation Rapture.
- 4) Pre-Tribulation references were found in the writings of Catholic priest Emmanuel Lacunza in 1812.
- 5) Dr. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (1813-1875), a prominent English theologian and biblical scholar, wrote a pamphlet in 1866 tracing the concept of the Rapture through the works of John Darby back to Edward Irving.
- 6) Although not using the term Rapture, the idea was more fully developed by Edward Irving (1792-1834). Irving directed his attention to the study of prophecy and eventually accepted the one-man Antichrist idea, yet he went further. Irving began to teach a two-phase return of Christ, the first phase being a secret Rapture prior to the Rise of the Antichrist.
- 7) Matthew Henry used the term in his commentary of 1 Thessalonians 4.
- 8) John Nelson Darby, considered by many to be the father of dispensationalism, first popularized the pre-tribulation Rapture in 1827.
- 9) Other books published which popularized the pre-Tribulation Rapture, are as follows William Eugene Blackstone's JESUS IS COMING (1878) which sold more than 1.3 million copies and the Scofield Reference Bible, published in 1909 and 1919 and revised in 1967.
- 10) In 1957, John Walvoord, a theologian at Dallas Theological Seminary, authored a book, THE RAPTURE QUESTION that gave theological support to the pre-Tribulation Rapture.

- 11) In 1958, J. Dwight Pentecost authored another book supporting the pre-Tribulation Rapture, THINGS TO COME: A STUDY IN BIBLE ESCHATOLOGY.
- 12) During the 1970's there was an increase in the study of the Rapture concept because of the writing of Hal Lindsey, beginning with, THE LATE GREAT PLANET EARTH.
- 13) In 1995, the doctrine of the pre-Tribulation Rapture was further popularized by Tim LaHaye's, LEFT BEHIND series.
- 14) In the last 20-25 years there have been literally dozens of books written on this subject.

The following is a well-known myth on how the concept of the Rapture was created. The rise in the belief in the "pre-Tribulation" rapture is often wrongly attributed to a 15-year old Scottish-Irish girl named Margaret McDonald (a follower of Edward Irving), who in 1830 had a vision of the end times which described a post-Tribulation view of the Rapture that was first published in 1840. It was published again in 1861, but two important passages demonstrating a post-Tribulation view were removed to encourage confusion concerning the timing of the Rapture. (I will give more details on this event in my class presentation)

The concept of the Rapture has had a very colorful history with many ups and downs. The evil nature of man has taken the word of God and distorted it for his own benefit. God originally intended his word to be used so that men would understand what was required of them to have a correct relationship with him and a correct relationship with other men, therefore, bringing Hope and Light into the world. However, given man's evil nature man continuously used God's Holy word for his own benefit with little or no regard for how destructive it would be to other men and the world in general? The more important issue is how God would judge them for their sins.

The bottom line is: God's word has not changed since it was written, starting over 6000 years ago. The only thing that ever changes is what is in man's heart when he reads God's word and how he reacts to it.

Summary:

- 1) It would appear that the very early church fathers showed little concern about the sequencing of these events as they thought it was all going to happen SOON.
- 2) Once the church became part of the state religion, man's sin nature took over and power & control of other men became the driving force of the church, with little if no regard for the original intent of God's word.
- 3) However, once again God entered history through the Reformation and moved men's hearts to seek out God's original intent from the Holy Bible. The true meaning of God's Holy Word began to be understood and preached boldly.
- 4) During modern times the outcome is yet to be determined! It would appear that given the amount of books written on this subject and all of God's word, many people are hearing, however given our actions and lifestyles, we are also not hearing. As it says in Revelations chapters 2 & 3, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Some notable recent Rapture predictions include the following:

- 1844- William Miller predicted that Christ would return between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844, and then revised his prediction, claiming to have miscalculated Scripture, to October 22, 1844.
- 1914, 1918, 1925, 1942, various dates predicted for the Rapture by the Jehovah's Witnesses.
- 1981- Chuck Smith predicted that Jesus would probably return by 1981.
- 1988- Publications of, 88 REASONS WHY THE RAPTURE IS IN 1988 by Edgar C. Whisenant.
- Publication of, THE FINAL SHOUT: RAPTURE REPORT 1989 by Edgar Whisenant. The author made further predictions of the Rapture for 1992, 1995 and other years.

- 1992- A Korean group, MISSIONS FOR THE COMING DAYS predicted October 28, 1992 as being the date of the Rapture.
- 1993- Seven years before the year 2000; the Rapture would have to start to allow for seven years of the Tribulation before the return in 2000 -- multiple predictions.
- 1994- Pastor John Hinkle of Christ church in Los Angeles predicted that the rapture would occur on June 9, 1994. Radio evangelist Harold Camping predicted September 6, 1994.
- 2011- Harold Camping revised prediction for May 21, 2011 as the date of the Rapture. After this prediction proved inaccurate, he claimed that a non-visible “spiritual judgment” had taken place, and that the physical Rapture would occur on October 21, 2011.
- 2060- Sir Isaac Newton proposed, based upon his calculations using figures from the Book of Daniel that the Apocalypse could not happen no earlier than 2060. Ref. 4

The bottom line is the concept of the Rapture is real, as there is adequate evidence in God’s word to validate this concept; however, God has also made it very clear in his word that no one not even the Son knows the day and the hour.

Given the list above of supposedly intelligent men making such a prediction and they continue to do so even with obvious knowledge that the men of the past that made such predictions were always proven incorrect, yet they still continue to make such predictions. The obvious question is why do they continue to make such predictions? The short answer is “sin”. All men throughout history, even godly men, have fallen to the sin of “Human Arrogance”, putting their desires, their will, their wants ahead of what God blessed them with: His Holy word, His Son and a free gift- salvation for those who believe.

EIGHT COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Question 1)

Can those who hear and reject the gospel before the rapture be saved during the tribulations, assuming a pretribulation rapture?

→ Almost all people who study end-times prophecy would agree that people living during the tribulations will be saved. In fact, the salvation of lost men and women is one of the primary purposes of the tribulation period. The prophet Joel wrote, "And anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. There will be people on Mount Zion in Jerusalem who escape, just as the Lord has said. These will be among the survivors whom the Lord has called." Joel 2:32. Also, Revelations 7:9-14 states, "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the thrown and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the lamb. All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever, Amen!" Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know," And he said, "these are they who have come out of the great tribulations; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

However, many people who study prophecy contend that the world during the time of the tribulations will be composed of two types of people.

One, those people who have heard the gospel but did not clearly understand it, therefore did not openly reject it before the Rapture will have another chance at receiving Christ.

Two, those people who have heard the gospel before the Rapture (assuming it will be a pretribulation rapture) and at the start

of the Tribulations DID UNDERSTAND IT and openly rejected Christ's offer of salvation prior to the rapture and start of the tribulation. This second group will then be precluded by God from ever being saved during the Tribulations. They believe that God will send a strong delusion upon this second group that will prevent them from ever accepting Christ's offer of salvation. They base their belief on 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12: "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness."

However, as with many prophetic issues this verse also has two interpretations. One is that this verse does support the belief as stated in #2, that anyone who has heard the Gospel and openly rejected it will be preclude from ever being saved. Two claims that the context of this entire passage, 2 Thessalonians 2: 1-17, is describing what will be happening during the Tribulation period and those who witness the deception of the Antichrist and believe his lies and accepting his mark, therefore, knowingly rejecting the truth. Then, God sends the delusion that will preclude them from ever believing the truth.

These two views create a very different picture of the salvation process during the tribulation period. It would appear that the only real way to be sure of the correct answer would be to live through this time period and see for yourself, however, if that becomes the case it would appear you are in real trouble because the rapture has just taken place and you will go through the Tribulations.

Given this would not be the preferred method, we need to remember, scripture always needs to be used to interpret scripture when there is no other clear method. Listed below are three scriptures on this subject:

Matt. 12:31-32, "And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or the age to come."

Mark 3:28-29, "I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven."

Luke 12:10, "And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven."

Based on the above scripture it would appear that if a person was to "blaspheme the Holy Spirit", regardless of when it happened (pre or post rapture), they would be precluded from salvation and condemned to hell.

Question 2)

What will happen to babies/infants and young children at the rapture?

➔ There are 3 primary views on this issue:

a) No children will be included in the Rapture.

Those who believe in this view base their opinion on two points:

One is the rapture is only for believers, who have personally accepted Christ as their savior, see ➔ John 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:50-57 ; 1 Thess. 4:13-18

Two, during the days of Noah when the flood covered the earth, small children were not excluded from destruction.

See ➔ Gen. 7:21-23

b) All babies/infants and young children will be included in the Rapture.

Those who believe this view base their opinion on the biblical concept that babies/infants and small children who die prior to the age of accountability will go to heaven. They focus on

several Bible passages to support their opinion, 2 Samuel 12:20-23, Matthew 18:13-15, Mark 10:13-16.

There does not seem to be any question, based on scripture, about whether babies/infants and young children under the age of accountability, will go to heaven if they die prior to reaching this age. However, scripture tells us that the Rapture does not require the death of anyone. It is when believers are transformed from a human/ mortal body to a heavenly glorified body.

It would appear this view has, at least, two primary weaknesses. One is that the scripture listed above was God's plan to protect children who die prior to the age of accountability, so as not to condemn them to hell prior to their being able to make their own decision about Christ. Two is that if these babies/infants and young children were part of the Rapture it would seem that God would have by-passed their Freewill to choose or not to choose Christ and still be in heaven. Therefore, it seems as though the scripture being used to support this view and the biblical facts are not in sync.

- c) Babies/infants and young children of believers will be raptured.

This view is supported by two primary scriptural concepts:

a) Paul states in 1 Corinthians 7:14 that in Christian families the children are, "set a part for him" or "they are Holy". Therefore, it would seem, based on God being a God of justices, that he would not rapture the believing parents to heaven, and then leave their defenseless children alone in the world during the tribulation period.

b) There seems to be some biblical precedent for this view: First, when God destroyed the world with water he saved Noah and all his children, however, he destroyed all unbelievers and all their children:

Second, when God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah he spared Lot and his daughters but destroyed all unbelievers and all their children:

Third, in Egypt at the time of the first Passover the homes of the believers, which included their young children, were protected from the judgment of God by the blood on the doorpost.

To summarize it would seem that when God enters history to protect his own he also protects their children who are living in the home and he destroys all unbelievers and the children living in their homes. Another way of saying this would be all children under the protection of a believing/saved parent.

Question 3)

If all believers are raptured before the tribulation, who are the believers on earth during the tribulation?

It is true that at the very next moment after the Rapture all believers will be in heaven with God/Christ. However, the real question should be, how are the people living during the tribulations saved? The answer is, 'by the grace of God' and that is exactly how the people living prior to, as well as, during the tribulation will be saved. There is very little written about the details of this process in the scripture, however, we do know that in Revelations 7 God seals 144,000 Jewish men to do his work. It would appear these are super evangelist, Revelations 7:9 also tells us that "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the thrown and in front of the Lamb." Because of these words we can be assured that many will be saved during the Tribulation period.

The ways that people could be saved are too numerous to count, however, a few of the more popular one's are as follows:

- 1) The 144,000 sealed Jews become evangelists to the world.
- 2) Left over Bibles, Christians tapes, books and DVD's.
- 3) Family members and friends of Raptured believers remembering what the believer had said about end-times events.

4) People in general remembering what believers had said about Christ and salvation prior to the rapture.

The list could go on and on, however, the point is, based on Rev. 7:9 the number saved during the Tribulations is very large, just as God's grace is endless.

Question 4)

If the Church has been removed from the earth prior to the tribulations, why does the Bible tell us so much about those years?

There has been much discussion on this issue over the last 2,000 years even to the point of if Revelations should have been included in the Bible. However, what we do know for sure and maybe not all inclusive is as follows:

- a) The 7 year tribulation period is the final week of the prophecy given by Daniel in his 70 week prophecy about Israel. This 7 year period on earth deals with Israel not the Church. (Dan. 9:20-27)
- b) During the Tribulation period God deals directly with man and the earth. He makes his presence known as Creator and the only true God of the universe, thus making it plain for man to know for sure that he is God and giving man another chance to repent and accept Christ as savior. Many will be saved during this 7 year period. See → Rev. 16: 8-9, "The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control of these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him." Again, they knew God was God and they knowingly rejected him. As a result they were condemned to hell.
- c) The conclusion of the tribulation period marks the end of the reign of Satan on planet earth and the beginning of the 1000 year reign of Christ on planet earth. (Rev. 20)
- d) As far as it is known in the scripture, the beginning of the tribulation period starts the final process of ending sin. The New

Heaven and New Earth will be sinless as God will now dwell with men. (Rev.21:3)

Question5)

Is it ever right or correct for anyone to set a date for the rapture?

The answer is, only if you want to be wrong or incorrect. Many have tried and ALL have failed. A few of the verses that explain what believers need to know about this subject is as follows,

- a) "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the father.", Matt. 24:36
- b) "Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come." Matt. 24:42
- c) "So you also must be ready, because the Son of man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." Matt. 24:44
- d) "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." Matt. 25:13
- e) "He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the father has set by his own authority." Acts 1:7

Therefore, it is safe to say, that all who have attempted to set this date have failed and the Bible tells us in numerous places that no one knows except God the Father. Then anyone with spiritual discernment at all would know that trying to set this date would be unwise. However, what we can know is that there will be certain "SIGNS" that will appear when the end is near and "near" is not defined in terms of a specific amount of time. Matt. 24; Mark 13: Luke 21. The "END" being defined as the Tribulation period, therefore, regardless of which of the rapture scenario you select your range of error is only 0 to 7 years.

Question 6)

After we have been raptured to heaven will believers be able to watch the events of the Tribulations unfold on earth?

The believers who think that you will be able to see the events unfolding during the tribulations site the following as examples of proof:

- a) Samuel the prophet, after his death, appeared to King Saul and was aware of at least some of the events surrounding Saul and his kingdom. (1 Sam. 28:16-18)
- b) The rejoicing in heaven over the salvation of a sinner on earth seems to include believers who already in heaven as well as angels. (Luke 15:7,10)
- c) The martyrs in heaven in Revelations 6:9-10 are aware that their persecutors are still alive on earth during the tribulations.
- d) The multitude in heaven in Revelations 19:1-6 is aware of the destruction of Babylon on earth near the end of the tribulation.

Although the above are examples of where it would appear that believers in heaven can see events as they unfold on earth, it is still unclear if all events on earth are seen by all heavenly beings. Second, based on scripture, it would seem more likely that all beings in heaven, both believers and angels would find it more interesting to focus on the events in heaven rather than what is going on down on earth. This is just an assumption.

Question 7)

Are there any more prophecies that must be fulfilled before the rapture can occur?

The short answer is, NO. However, this is somewhat misleading given there were no signs which had to occur to start with. The rapture is a signless, imminent, any-moment event from a human point of view. It should also be stated that the Rapture will be a “sudden” event. All of the passages listed in both the Old and New Testament describe signs and events related to the Second Coming of Christ.

Question 8)

How will the people who are left behind explain the Rapture?

There are two primary views of how this event will be explained,

- 1) The natural or science explanation.
- 2) The supernatural explanation.

- a) The natural or science explanation; includes a list of potential options but not all are included: UFO abductions, a time warp, new weapons of mass destruction, parallel universe.
- b) The supernatural explanation explains that there really is a God and he just fulfilled another prophecy, (see, 1 Cor. 15:50-57; 1 Thess. 4:13-18 ; John 14:1-3)

CONCLUSION →

The Rapture of the Saints will happen as God said.

The timing of the Rapture is subject to interpretation.

Men who set the date for the Rapture should not be trusted.

Various questions about issues related to the Rapture are open to interpretation.

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