

The Rapture!

What is the Rapture? Is it taught in the Bible? Who will be caught up? Is the Rapture distinct from Christ's visible return to earth? When will the Rapture occur? This article will search the Word of God to answer these important questions.

Definition of the Rapture

Rapture is an English word derived from the Latin word *raeptius*, taken from the Latin Vulgate translation, which in turn is a translation of the Greek word *harpazo*. *Harpazo* is found 13 times in the New Testament. *Harpazo* means *to seize, catch away, caught up or taken away by force*.

The clearest passage describing the Rapture is found in 1 Thessalonians 4. In this chapter the Apostle Paul describes the "catching away" of the believers to meet the Lord in the air:

"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep (died), lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we (believers in Christ) 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* (Gr. *harpazo*) 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 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

This Scripture describes the Rapture as the wonderful event when all true believers in Christ will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord!

What other Scriptures teach us about the Rapture?

In addition to 1 Thessalonians 4, there are several other New Testament passages that describe this event. Here are two examples:

"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also**" (John 14:2-3).

"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep (die), 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 (believers still alive on earth) shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

As we will survey shortly, there are many addition passages – both in the Old and New Testaments – that will help us determine the nature and the timing of the Rapture.

Is the Rapture distinct from Christ’s return to reign on earth?

God’s Word presents several significant distinctions between the Rapture and Christ’s Glorious Appearance when He will return to earth to rule and reign. The following table compares some of these differences.

Rapture	Glorious Appearance
1) Christ comes <i>for</i> His own (John 14:3; 1 Thess. 4:17)	Christ comes <i>with</i> His own (Jude 14-15; Rev. 1:7; 19:14)
2) He comes in the air (1 Thess. 4:17)	He comes to the earth (Zech. 14:4-5; Acts 1:11)
3) He comes to claim His bride (John 14:3; 1 Thess. 4:16-17)	He returns to earth with His bride (Rev. 19:6-14)
4) Only His own see Him (1 Thess. 4:13-18)	Every eye shall see Him (Rev. 1:7; Matt. 24:30; Col. 3:4)
5) Saved are delivered from wrath (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Rev. 3:10)	Unsaved experience the wrath of God (Nahum 1:2; Rev. 6-18)
6) At the Rapture Jesus comes as a thief – the world will be taken by surprise (1 Thessalonians 5:1-6; Rev. 3:3)	At the Second Coming there is global war (Armageddon) – no one is asleep (Revelation 16:12-17; 19:11-21)
7) Life continues as usual, and people are complacent until the day of the Rapture (Luke 17:26-30; Revelation 3:3, 14-22)	None will be complacent, nor will life carry-on as normal, during the Tribulation (Matthew 24:21; Revelation 6-19)

There are several other distinctions that we will examine, but these are plain. Perhaps the most obvious difference is that at the Rapture believers will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. In other words, at the Rapture, Jesus receives us to Himself, while at His Glorious Appearing Jesus returns to earth with us.

Scriptures of Jesus’ return to reign on earth

In contrast to the Rapture, at Jesus’ Glorious Appearing He returns to reign on earth with the saints:

“Behold, the day of the LORD is coming...For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem...Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives ...**Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You**...And the LORD shall be King over all the earth” (Zechariah 14:1-5, 9).

“...so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ **with all His saints**” (1 Thess. 3:13).

“Behold, the Lord comes **with ten thousands of His saints**, to execute judgment on all” (Jude 1:14-15).

“Behold, **He is coming with clouds**, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen” (Revelation 1:7). The phrase *with clouds* is apparently an idiom for the saints (cf. Daniel 7:13; Mark 14:62).

“**And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses**” (Revelation 19:14).

“Immediately after the tribulation... they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:29-30).

These Scriptures reveal that Christ’s Glorious Appearing is with the saints and that it occurs immediately after the Tribulation. Therefore the Rapture must precede this event.

Dual Application

At this point in our study it is important to remember one of the mistakes that the Jews of Jesus’ day made. They expected Jesus to set up His earthly Kingdom immediately (Matt. 21:8-9; Acts 1:6). Apparently most Jews either ignored or were unaware of the Old Testament prophecies specifying that the Messiah would not only rule and reign from Jerusalem, but that He must serve, suffer, die, and be raised from the dead. Looking back, we now understand that the Messianic prophecies foretold two distinct events: 1) The first time Jesus came as our suffering Servant to die for our sins and rise for our justification. 2) The second time He will return to rule and reign. Likewise, Scripture specifies that the Rapture and the Glorious Appearing are two separate events.

Another example of a dual event contained in a biblical prophecy is found in Luke 4:18-19. When Jesus began His ministry He quoted only the first part of the Isaiah 61:1-3 prophecy: “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”

Jesus stopped short of reading through the rest of this prophecy. Why didn't He quote the rest of Isaiah's prophecy which states "And the day of vengeance of our God; (and) to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion..."? Evidently because Jesus knew that He would only be fulfilling the first part of this prophecy during His first advent. The remainder of Isaiah's prophecy will be fulfilled during the Day of the Lord and subsequently.

Though the Jews considered Isaiah 61 one continuous event, Jesus revealed to them that it would be fulfilled in two stages. This dual fulfillment is common throughout the Word of God. Therefore we should not be surprised that the Bible teaches that Jesus will first return *for* His bride, followed by Jesus returning *with* His bride.

Defining Terms

Before examining God's Word further, we should define three terms.

1) *Daniel's 70th week* refers to the final seven years of world history commencing when the antichrist confirms a peace covenant with Israel for seven years (Daniel 9:27).

2) *The Great Tribulation* refers to the last 3 ½ years of this period beginning with the abomination of desolation (Daniel 9:27; 12:6-11; Matthew 24:15-22; Revelation 13:5; etc.).

3) *The Day of the Lord* apparently refers to *The Great Tribulation* (Isaiah 13:6-16; Ezekiel 30:1-3; Joel 2:1-13; 3:9-16; Zephaniah 1; Zechariah 14; etc.). However, other passages indicate that it refers to the entire final seven years of judgment. See First Thessalonians 5:2-6 and refer to points 1, 2, 8, 9, and 10 below.

New Testament allusions to the Rapture

Let's now examine the Scriptures to determine what God has revealed concerning the timing of the Rapture, beginning with several New Testament passages:

1) In Matthew 24:42 Jesus instructs us to "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming." This and many other passages indicate the Lord can return at any moment. Only a Pre-Seventieth Week of Daniel Rapture is truly imminent – it could happen at any time (like a thief). Neither a Post-Tribulation nor Mid-Tribulation Rapture could occur at any moment because we know that certain events must transpire first (Antichrist's emergence; signing of the seven-year peace treaty; seal judgments; etc.) Furthermore, we could calculate the time of Christ's return if it were Mid or Post-Tribulation based on when the Antichrist signs the seven-year peace treaty (Dan. 9:27; 12:6-12; Rev. 13:5; etc). Therefore only a Pre-Seventieth Week of Daniel Rapture is truly imminent. (See the final section of this paper for answers to common objections to this position).

2) In Luke chapter 4, Jesus begins His ministry by going into the synagogue in Nazareth and He *stood up to read* (v. 16). Jesus then reads the beginning of Isaiah's prophecy: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor...to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD" (Luke 4:18-19; cf. Isaiah 61:1-2). Jesus then *sat down* (v. 20), stopping short of quoting the rest of Isaiah's prophecy which states "And the day of vengeance of our God..." (Isaiah 61:2). Then in Revelation chapter 5, we read: "in the midst of the throne...*stood* a Lamb as though it had been slain" (v. 6). Jesus is now standing once again – this time ready to open the seal judgments and thus to fulfill "the day of vengeance of our God." This appears to occur at the beginning or prior to Daniel's 70th Week because the seal judgments begin with the false peace ushered in by the Antichrist (Rev. 6:1-4). Therefore, because the church is already in heaven (Rev. 5:8-10), and Antichrist emerges at the beginning of Daniel's 70th Week (Dan. 9:27; 2 Thess. 2:2-3; Rev. 6:1-4), it would seem that the Rapture occurs prior to the final seven year period.

3) In Luke 12:36, the Lord is returning to earth *from* a wedding. Jesus comes back to earth from a wedding – one that took place in heaven. Of course there must be a bride in heaven if there is a wedding in heaven. Therefore the church, which is the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2), would already be in heaven prior to the Lord's return to earth.

4) In Luke 21:34-36 Jesus warns us take heed and to pray always that we may be worthy to *escape* the Tribulation (not pray to survive through it). If Jesus tells His own that there is an escape, then there must be one.

5) In Revelation 2:22, Jesus warns those who are in bed with Jezebel (a type of the queen of Revelation 17) that they will be "**cast into great tribulation.**" However those who are not involved in this idolatry will apparently not have to experience it (Rev. 2:24-25). Therefore, it appears that true believers will be removed prior to the Great Tribulation.

6) In Revelation 3:10 Jesus promises those who have kept His Word: "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.***" *The hour of trial* upon the whole earth can only refer to the Tribulation period (Matthew 24:21). Therefore, Revelation 3:10 assures us that true believers will be kept from the hour of trial that will come upon the whole world. Notice that Jesus did not say we would be *preserved through* or *kept in* the Tribulation.

7) In Revelation 3 the church of the Laodiceans (professing believers) will be vomited into a refining fire because they are lukewarm (v. 16-18). The church of the Laodiceans is the last of the seven churches listed and accurately depicts the visible last days church we see today. Sadly, it appears that a large part of the professing church will enter the Tribulation – many of whom will finally repent during the Great Tribulation (Rev. 3:19; 7:9-14).

8) Immediately after Jesus addresses the seven churches, and specifically the final, last days Laodicean church, John is called up into heaven – from there to witness the events

that “must take place after this” (Rev. 4:1). Remarkably, John hears a voice in heaven which sounded like a trumpet, saying “Come up here” and immediately he was caught up into heaven. This sounds like the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:16-17). Could it be that the voice of the archangel described in 1 Thessalonians 4 will shout “Come up here” in unison with the trumpet of God?!

9) In Revelation 5:9-10 the church is in heaven singing a song that only they can sing. Verse 8 explains that there in heaven are the prayers of the saints. As all Bible-believers know we are not to pray to the dead and departed. Therefore these must be our (the church’s) accumulated prayers which will now be answered as God judges the world and also saves all who will repent (those who we’ve previously witnessed too and prayed for).

10) During the Tribulation, from Revelation chapters 6 through 19, the church is no longer mentioned. Why? Apparently we’ve been removed from earth prior to this time. This is strong evidence for a Pre-Seventieth Week Rapture.

The Gospel of John

The Gospel of John is unique among the four Gospels. The other three Gospels – known as the synoptic Gospels – all include descriptions of the Tribulation (Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 17 and 21) and seem to focus on converting the Jews and offering the kingdom to the Jews first. In contrast, in John’s Gospel the apocalyptic sayings are missing, and the Gospel is presented for all to believe.

John’s Gospel is clearly to the whole world (John 3:16) and John’s stated purpose in writing his Gospel is “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31). Of course the church consists of all who will repent and trust Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Therefore it is interesting that only John’s gospel specifically references the Rapture: “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3).

John’s gospel is written so all would believe in Christ (the church), and he omits the Tribulation and mentions the Rapture. This is another indication that the church will not be on earth during the Tribulation.

Let’s now turn our attention to several Old Testament allusions to the Rapture. The Old Testament also anticipates the nature and timing of this wonderful event – and reveals the heart and love of our gracious Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

Old Testament Allusions to the Rapture¹

Perhaps some of the strongest arguments in favor of a Pre-Tribulation, Pre-Seventieth Week of Daniel Rapture are found in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament we see “a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things” (Hebrews 10:1). The Holy Spirit explains that these Old Testament types are preserved for our learning:

“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

“Now all these things happened to them (Old Testament characters) as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Bible students are well aware that there are numerous Old Testament types that foreshadow a New Testament fulfillment. A classic example is when Abraham took his son, his only son Isaac, whom he greatly loved, to the land of Moriah to offer him there as a sacrifice – concluding that God was able to raise him from the dead (Genesis 22; Hebrews 11:17-19). Abraham is a beautiful type of our heavenly Father, and Isaac, his beloved son, is a striking picture of Jesus, who willingly laid down His life on Mount Moriah 2,000 years later.

Though the Rapture was hidden in part from Old Testament believers, the types found throughout foreshadow a future Rapture when God removes His people prior to pouring out His wrath on a Christ-rejecting world. Let’s now review some of these beautiful types that foreshadow the Rapture:

1) In Noah’s day there were those who passed through the flood (Noah and his family in the ark); there were those who perished in the flood (the unbelieving world); and there was Enoch who was “translated” or “caught up” before the judgment of God was poured out. Enoch walked with God (Genesis 5:24) and pleased Him (Hebrews 11:5), just as Christians who abide in Christ please God (1 John 3:22). Interestingly, from the time God told Noah to enter the ark, until the time when the waters of the flood were on the earth, God granted seven more days for the world to repent (Gen. 7:1-10). Perhaps this is a foreshadow of the final seven-year period culminating in the final judgment (Rev. 19:11-21)?

2) In Lot’s day, Lot and his family were “removed” before God rained down His judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19). God did not just “preserve” them through His wrath, He removed them prior to judgment. Jesus said that just before His return it would be like the days of Noah (Luke 17:26) and like the days of Lot (Luke 17:28). Judgment in Sodom COULD NOT occur until Lot was removed (Genesis 19:22)!

¹ Many of these Old Testament types are found in Pastor Bil Gallatin’s wonderful booklet “Biblical Types of the Rapture of the Church” (Calvary Chapel of the Finger Lakes). Also refer to Don Mills’ book “Precepts of the Blessed Hope” for more types.

Remarkably, “while [Lot] lingered, the [angels] took hold of his hand, his wife’s hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city...Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there (v. 16, 22). In other words, they were forcibly removed prior to judgment and judgment could not commence until they safely arrived in the new city!

3) Joseph (a type of Christ in many ways) takes a gentile bride before the 7-year famine begins (Genesis 41:45). Notice in the account of Joseph that after he received his gentile bride, his brethren (the Israelites) and the entire world suffered a seven year famine (Genesis 41:54-57). During this time of famine many came to Joseph for food. Similarly, after Jesus receives His Bride, his brethren the Jews (and many in the world), will turn to the Lord Jesus for relief (Rev. 7). How fitting that the Great Tribulation is called the time of “the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it” (Jeremiah 30:7). It is also referred to as “the time of the Gentiles” (Ezekiel 30:3), and many gentiles will also be saved out of it (Rev. 7). The famine is a type of the Tribulation (Amos 8:11), and Egypt is a picture of the world. This account strongly suggests that Jesus will receive His bride before the 70th Week of Daniel – before the famine that will come upon the entire world.

4) In Joshua chapter 2, Rahab trusts the Lord and befriends the Jewish spies. By faith Rahab puts a scarlet thread in her window (a symbol of Christ’s blood) and she and her family are “brought out” of Jericho before the city is burned with fire (Joshua 6). Rahab is a prostitute (Heb. 11:31) and a Gentile woman (Joshua 2), yet she is found in the Messianic line (Matt. 1:5). Rahab is therefore a beautiful picture of the church (the bride of Christ). Though formerly a prostitute, Rahab, by faith, was made clean and delivered from God’s wrath. Amazingly, in this account, we again see seven days of warning preceding judgment (God’s gracious delay to encourage repentance). The armies of God marched around the city six days, and on the seventh day they marched around the city seven times, and then the city was finally destroyed (Joshua 6).

5) In 1 Samuel 25:39-42 Abigail is informed that King David (foreshadowing King Jesus) wants to take her as his bride. She immediately responds and “rose in haste” with five of her damsels to “depart” and go to David for the marriage. Compare this with Matthew 25:1-13 where five wise virgins who truly had oil went forth to meet the Bridegroom (Jesus) away from their dwelling place (earth). Interestingly, the name *Abigail* means *the Father’s joy!*

6) The Song of Solomon is an amazing picture of Christ and His church (Ephesians 5:29-32). In the Song of Solomon 2:8-13, the Bride (the church) hears the voice of her Beloved (Jesus) coming for her, then in verses 10 and 13, the Bridegroom speaks and calls His bride to “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.” This is a beautiful foreshadow of our marriage and honeymoon in heaven!

7) Isaiah 26:20-21 also gives us a possible picture of the Rapture preceding the Tribulation: “Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation is past. For behold, the LORD comes out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; the

earth will also disclose her blood, and will no more cover her slain.” Apparently, believers are tucked away in heaven before the Tribulation falls on the earth. This may also apply to the Jews who hide away in Petra during the Tribulation?

8) In Daniel chapter 3, King Nebuchadnezzar (a type of the Antichrist, cf. Rev. 13) demands that the entire population bow down to his image. Daniel’s three friends (Jews) are preserved *through* the fiery tribulation, but Daniel is nowhere to be found. Daniel was “ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon” (Dan. 2:48), yet he is missing from the account. Why? Daniel was apparently *away*. Might he be a type of the Church?! Three times Daniel is called “greatly beloved” (Daniel 9:23; 10:11; 10:19).

9) In Zephaniah 2:2-3 we read: “Before the decree is issued, or the day passes like chaff, Before the LORD'S fierce anger comes upon you, Before the day of the LORD'S anger comes upon you! Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the LORD'S anger.” Believers will be *hidden* in the day of the Lord’s anger (cf. Isaiah 26:20-21). See also: Zephaniah 1:7.

10) Malachi chapter 3 deals with the Day of the Lord. Interestingly, Malachi 3:18 implies two comings: “Then shall ye (believers) return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.” It becomes clear when we read the entire context of Malachi 3 that believers shall return to the earth. In order to return and discern, believers must have first been caught away to heaven.

Issac and Rebekah, as well as Ruth and Boaz, also provide beautiful pictures of Christ taking a Gentile bride – one who counts the cost and leaves their own family – but is not required to suffer through great tribulation or famine. Other examples could be expounded on, but these should be sufficient to show that Christians will be removed before God’s wrath is poured out and likely before the 70th Week of Daniel.

Does the Bible Teach Imminency?

“And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!” (Mark 13:37).

One of the strongest arguments for the Pre-Tribulation Rapture position is the Scriptural doctrine of imminency. Repeatedly the Bible tells us that this event could happen at any moment. No event must precede it. For example, see: Luke 12:35-37, 40.

If the Lord’s return is imminent as the Bible states, then the Rapture must occur before Daniel’s 70th week because during this seven year period there are specific events that must occur first.

For example, Scripture specifies that the seven year peace agreement must be signed first, Antichrist must be revealed, and many other events must first transpire before the mid-

point of the 70th week. Therefore an imminent Rapture could only occur before the Great Tribulation, and even before Daniel's 70th week (the final 7 years).

We are repeatedly admonished to "look up" and "be ready" and "watch". If the Antichrist must appear first then there is no reason to watch and be sober. One can lead a lukewarm Christian life until Antichrist appears, and then when he does, one can become serious about following Christ. However, God's Word repeatedly exhorts us to, "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42).

Scripture also tells us that we are to be "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). If the Rapture were after the Antichrist is revealed, then we would have to be looking for the Antichrist first. But that's not what the Bible tells us to do. We are told to be looking for the blessed hope, and Antichrist is not our blessed hope.

Jesus cautioned His church: "Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you." (Revelation 3:3). From this passage we know that there will be some professing Christians who are not watching for the Lord's return. Those who will not watch will enter the Tribulation.

Will the World be taken by surprise by the Rapture?

A thief gives no warning when he plans to break in. Jesus uses the idiom of a thief to describe His return. As we shall see, this provides strong evidence in favor of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture. The Lord explained that the conditions on earth at His coming would be like the days of Noah. Folks would be carrying on with their lives as normal – unaware and unconcerned about the approaching judgment. Please read Jesus word's carefully:

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when

he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 24:36-51).

Though the world will be taken by surprise, believers will not:

“For you (believers) yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they (the unsaved world) say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:2-6).

That the world will be taken by surprise is strong evidence for a Pre-Tribulation Rapture. Why? Simply because there is no way that people experiencing the Great Tribulation will be carrying on with business as usual (as in the days of Noah and Lot). Nor will they be declaring peace and safety. In fact, the Book of Revelation records their reaction as God’s wrath is being poured out:

“And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’” (Revelation 6:15-17).

“In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them” (Revelation 9:6).

No one will be asleep or complacent during the Great Tribulation. In fact, Jesus states that during the day of the Lord that “men’s hearts [will fail] them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Luke 21:26-27). The world will definitely not be carrying on with life as usual.

Despite all the last days signs currently lining up, amazingly, as the Bible foretold, most of the world is asleep – unaware of the fast-approaching Day of the Lord. And today, as never before, many are crying for peace and unity. This fits perfectly with a Pre-Tribulation (and a Pre-Seventieth Week of Daniel) Rapture. Today the world is carrying on with life as usual; the world is crying for global peace as never before; but as Scripture warns, sudden destruction will come upon them unaware (1 Thess. 5:3).

Is a Post-Tribulation Rapture Possible?

There are many passages that we've already reviewed that seem to negate a Post-Tribulation Rapture. However, perhaps the most convincing Scripture is from Jesus Himself:

“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” (Matthew 24:29-31).

Try to imagine this time: most of the earth is now destroyed, torched, decimated by the plagues described in the Book of Revelation. Armageddon is complete, and the remaining minuscule population is now sitting in total darkness. Then the stars fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens are shaken. Then Jesus returns. Then the elect are gathered.

Is there anyway that people could be living in complacency (like the days Noah) and not expecting the Lord's return at this point? Could Jesus come as an unexpected thief after the Tribulation? This passage nullifies any biblical basis for a Post-Tribulation Rapture.

This passage must refer to Jesus' Glorious Appearance *with* the saints. The elect in this passage refers to Jews (and others?) who were saved and remain alive after the Tribulation.

Jesus posed this question “when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). If the Rapture were at the end of the Tribulation, this question would make no sense. However, if the Rapture precedes the Tribulation, this makes sense. The Rapture will have previously removed millions of Christians before the Tribulation; countless more will be saved during the Tribulation – but most martyred or killed by the plagues before the Tribulation ends; and only a third of the Jews will survive and be saved through till the end (Zechariah 13:8-9). This all fits with a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.

Are Christians appointed to experience God's Wrath?

The Bible states that all follows of Christ will experience tribulation, suffering, and persecution. However, Scripture emphatically denies that believers have been appointed to wrath.

When Jesus died on the cross, the full force of the Father's wrath for our sins was absorbed by Jesus. Jesus paid the full price for our sins. Because of Christ's substitutionary death, we will not suffer the wrath of God – either on this earth or in hell. Thank you Lord for the gift of forgiveness and eternal life!

The Good News is that Jesus did it all: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Here are some of the passages that confirm that believers will not suffer the wrath of God:

“Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (Romans 5:9).

“And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us *from* the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:10). The Greek word *from* is *ek* and it means *from* or *out of* – not *through*.

“The righteous perishes, and no man takes it to heart; merciful men are taken away, while no one considers that the righteous is taken away from evil” (Isaiah 57:1)

“**For God did not appoint us to wrath**, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

“God is jealous, and the LORD avenges; the LORD avenges and is furious. The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, and **He reserves wrath for His enemies**” (Nahum 1:2).

To say that God would preserve us “through” the Tribulation ignores the plagues that affect the whole world. Revelation chapters 6 through 19 describes the time when God’s wrath is poured out on all the earth. These judgments include: turning the waters to blood; over half the world’s population being killed; torching a third of the trees, destroying a third of all ships; darkening the sun; scorching heat; the cities fall; great hail; etc. There is no way that God’s wrath would not affect us if we were still here. Thank you Father that Jesus delivers us from the wrath to come!

Summary

The timing of the Rapture – though important – is not essential doctrine, and we should never be divisive regarding this issue. However, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Therefore the many passages indicating a Pre-Tribulation Rapture are beneficial. One benefit is that it encourages believers to live a pure and sober life – knowing the Lord could return today: “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3).

Another benefit is that it should give believers a great urgency. Rather than saying “My master is delaying his coming” (Matthew 24:48), this biblical doctrine encourages believers to always watch and be ready.

This urgency should also cause believers to diligently seek the Lord and reach the lost. Knowing that no one has tomorrow guaranteed should stir us to “Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind” (Luke 14:21), and “Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel (strongly urge) them to come in, that my house (heaven) may be filled” (Luke 14:23).

Whatever our position on the nature and timing of the Rapture, may we all seek the Lord diligently and reach the lost urgently in the time we have left.

Answers to common Rapture questions and objections (Questions are in blue, answers are in black)

Because certain events must occur prior to the Rapture, doesn't this destroy the doctrine of imminency?

There are a few passages that seem to contradict an imminent Rapture. For instance, Jesus tells Peter he will grow old and be martyred (John 21:18-19). Therefore the Rapture could not occur before Peter's death. This is a special case though, and the Bible explains why: “For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death” (1 Corinthians 4:9). The apostles knew they would be martyred as a witness to Christ. So to be perfectly accurate, the Rapture has been imminent starting after the apostles' death. However, this exception does not change the repeated biblical teaching that the church in general is to be looking for the imminent return of Christ. Moreover, Jesus prophesied many last days signs, but none of these had to occur before the Rapture, because He could be issuing a warning to those who remain after the Rapture. That we've witnessed the fulfillment of many last days signs lining-up is a testimony to God's patience and grace – that He is long-suffering, not willing that any perish, but all would come to repentance.

In Revelation 16:15 Jesus states He is coming as a thief during the battle of Armageddon. How could anyone be surprised while Amageddon is commencing?

This may simply be an inserted warning to readers of all generations. It is quite common for the Lord to insert a parenthetical warning that seems out of context. He does this to wake up and warn the reader.

The apostle Paul plainly said in 2 Thessalonians 2 that the coming of the Lord and our gathering together unto him would not take place until two things happened first. #1 the falling away (religious apostasy), AND #2 the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition. The man of sin has not been revealed yet, and what two things happen when he does get revealed? #1 we then are gathered (raptured), #2 he gets destroyed by the brightness of the Lord's coming. There is no 7 year period between verse 1 and verse 8

of 2 Thess. 2. That "the coming" in verse 1 and "his coming" in verse 8 is the same "coming" that Paul was talking about appears obvious.

Please read 2 Thess. 2 again carefully. There are two distinct events in verse 1: "The coming of our Lord" which is the Second Coming as described in verse 8, AND "our gathering together to Him" which is the Rapture. This is a common mistake. Paul is not setting forth a chronology in verse one. Rather, in verse 2 he sets the context as "the day of the Lord" which refers to the Tribulation. Then Paul goes on to say that "the falling away comes first" (which we are currently witnessing) AND "the man of sin revealed". These two events precede "the day of the Lord" not the Rapture. That we're currently seeing these events line up indicates "the day of the Lord" is fast approaching. And from many other verses that clearly indicate the Rapture precedes this "day" by some amount, means Jesus is coming for us soon. We need to be witnessing to the lost – time is short!

According to the book of Revelation, there are 7 trumpets that will blow, and the 7th trumpet is the last trumpet, so it would seem that the "last trump" in 1 Cor. 15:52 is that 7th trumpet. 1 Cor. 15 talks about the first resurrection, and since verses 5 and 6 of Rev. chapter 20 speaks of the first resurrection, then that first resurrection which happens at the gathering {rapture} would happen at the "last trump" {7th} since "last" means last, and it's immediately AFTER the tribulation as Jesus said. Verse 23 of 1 Cor. 15 says, no living saint before or after the tribulation will get caught up and get new bodies until the dead in Christ rises FIRST, as it says in 1 Thess. 4:16. Verse 17 says, "THEN {not before} we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds.....'

The seven angels blow trumpets of judgment – definitely not the same as the "last trump" which is the trump of blessing. The seventh trumpet does not sound at the end of the Great Tribulation but in the midst of it – there are still the vial/bowl judgments of Revelation 16.

The error here is distinguishing between the "last trump" which is for the church and the Trumpets which were integral to the Jews in Old Testament. The Book of Revelation refers to the Old Testament numerous times. All of its imagery and allusions come from the OT. Also remember that the Tribulation period – during which the seven trumpets of judgment sound – is primarily the time of "Jacob's Trouble". This 7th trumpet is a clarion call of judgment on the nation Israel. If you do a search in the OT on "Trumpets" and the number "seven" it appears that this is associated with judgment. And we know that the Jews who enter the Tribulation must either trust Yeshua, or be judged. Revelation's seven trumpets of judgment appear to be unrelated to the last trump for the church – which is one of blessing.

When Paul said "Wherefore comfort one another with these words.", he wasn't talking about escaping the tribulation, he was trying to comfort the Thessalonians who were wondering about what would happen to their saved loved ones who had passed on when the Lord does come back, and he explained that they would be coming back and getting new resurrected bodies and that they would be reunited, and that's why Paul said in verse

13, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not....."

Actually, in context, verses 13-18 of 1 Thess. 4 are obviously written both to comfort them concerning their loved ones who had already died AND to comfort them concerning the potentially imminent "catching up" of all believers – including themselves. Chapter 5:1-11 is equally clear that those who are "sons of light" would not be taken by surprise and would escape the wrath of God.

Paul said that the dead {sleeping in Jesus} would come back with the Lord in verse 14. Why would the Lord bring all those saints with him, if He is only coming for the saints that are alive, just to take them all back to heaven for another 7 years? Are they coming back to get new bodies just to go back to a spiritual place such as heaven? No, we all get new bodies to rule and reign down here.

Please re-read these passages. In 1 Thess. 4, Paul contrasts believers "we" with non-believers "them". We will be "caught up" to meet the Lord "in the clouds". This cannot be the same event that occurs when Jesus comes back to earth with the saints to stand on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4). Yes, those who have died in Christ will receive their glorified bodies first (as 1 Cor 15 describes), then we who remain alive will be immediately translated – and receive are new bodies instantaneously! Believers who are dead are already with the Lord – "to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). However they will not receive their new bodies until the Rapture. Jesus has spent 2000 years preparing our new spiritual bodies – our new dwellings: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come again and receive you to Myself*; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3).

All Christians go through tribulation. Why should the last generation be exempt?

Don't confuse the tribulation that ALL believers go through with the Great Tribulation. In this world we believers will suffer persecution; however the Great Tribulation is the day of wrath for a Christ rejecting world. No believer is appointed to wrath.

I agree 1 Thess.5:9 says believers are not appointed to wrath. Therefore God will protect us from the Tribulation plagues.

Please read Revelation 6-18 again. There is no way that God can pour out all these huge global plagues and not affect every person on earth. In fact the entire sea becomes blood; ALL sea creatures die; great hail falls on the whole earth; etc. (Rev. 16). Surely God's wrath will affect every person on earth. Furthermore, God goes out of His way to protect and preserve the 144,000 sealed Jews of Revelation 7. If the church were to go through the Tribulation, wouldn't God mention how He would also preserve us like the 144,000?

Many are martyred, but saved during the Tribulation (Rev. 7). Aren't these the church?

Many will be saved after the Rapture, but these folks are not the church for many reasons. One obvious reason is that Jesus said the "gates of hell will not prevail against the church" but during the Tribulation the beast makes war with the saints and overcomes them (Revelation 13:7). This is a different group of people – the Tribulation saints.

Was John talking about a pre-trib. rapture in Rev.1:7 when he said, "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and EVERY EYE SHALL SEE HIM, and THEY ALSO WHICH PIERCED HIM: and ALL KINDREDS of the earth shall wail....."

The "clouds" seem to be an idiom for believers – see: Daniel 7:13; Hebrews 12:1. Jesus is returning "with" the clouds. Christians are His "cloud of witnesses". Jude reminds us that when Jesus returns, He will bring us with Him: "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all..." (Jude 14, 15). So, yes, Rev. 1:7 agrees only with a pre-trib view.

John said, "I John, who also am your brother, and companion in TRIBULATION.....!" {Rev.1:9}. So John admits that we must go through tribulation.

Please don't confuse the Great Tribulation spoken about in both the Old and New Testaments, with general Christian persecution, trials and tribulations. Remember, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22). All who seek to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution, but this is not the Great Tribulation. The Day of the Lord, the Day of Wrath, the Time of Jacob's trouble, the Day of vengeance of our God ALL speak of a specific time when God deal's with the Jews and the Christ-rejecting world. The wrath and vengeance and penalty of God for a Christian were placed on Christ on the cross. He redeemed us from God's righteous wrath!

Rev. 19 only says that the beast and false prophet will be cast into the lake of fire, and the remnant {kings of the earth and their armies} will be killed with the sword. Most will be killed, but not every one, since there has to be some survivors in order to repopulate the earth during the millennium. Zechariah 14:16 even says, "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts....." So you see, there will be survivors after the Lord returns in order for some people to repopulate.

True. At the end of the Tribulation there will be those who did not take that mark of the beast, nor were they killed by the plagues. These folks will enter the millennium in human bodies and repopulate the earth. They will have 1000 years of paradise on earth under the Lord's reign from Jerusalem and then they and their descendents will be given one chance at the end to rebel (Revelation 20:7-9). Many rebel and many trust the Lord and enter eternal glory. During the millennium all believers will rule and reign with Christ for 1000 years. But this has nothing to do with the timing of the Rapture.

Are the Rapture and the Second Coming the same event?

No. This paper has given many reasons why these are two distinct events. Here's one more: Jesus said "when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). Now if the Rapture and the Second Coming were the same event, there would be millions who have faith at Jesus Second Coming. But if the Rapture removes the Church and Antichrist murders those who convert, then there will be few believers who survive (Rev. 13:15, 20:4).