

The Rapture

I. The Rapture

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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

A. The Origin of the Word “Rapture”

1 Thessalonians 4:17 *After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up (Latin = rapio) together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.*

B. A Biblical Doctrine

1. the church will be caught up from earth to meet the Lord in the air
2. additional scriptural support:

Matthew 24:30-31 *"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. ³¹ 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.*

3. not necessary to believe in the secret rapture in order to believe in the rapture

C. Placing the Rapture on the Prophetic Timeline

1. pretribulation = before a seven year tribulation during which the Antichrist is reigning
2. mid-tribulation = in the middle of that seven year period

3. at the Second Coming of Christ

D. The Pretribulation Rapture Explained and Supported

1. also known as the “Secret Rapture” because it happens suddenly, for some time zones in the middle of the night, certainly in the middle of life, with no warning at all except that already given in Scripture
2. all the true believers in Christ will be raptured... some extend it to children before the age of accountability
3. everyone not raptured are said to be “left behind”, hence the name of the popular series by Tim Lahaye and Jerry Jenkins
 - a. these folks are not necessarily going to hell
 - b. they may still repent and become “tribulation saints”
 - c. thus we cannot imagine that God is against putting some of His elect through the tribulations of Revelation or the reign of the Antichrist
4. scriptural support advanced by those who hold this view
 - a. allows the Lord to come at any time, making these warnings more poignant

Matthew 24:42-44 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

b. other passages

Matthew 24:37-42 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; ³⁹ and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴² "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

Coming of the lawless one will not occur until something is ‘taken away’... pretrib folks say this refers to the rapture of the church

2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. ⁷ For the secret power of lawlessness is already at

work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.

The fact that the church will not suffer wrath is another key concept:

1 Thessalonians 5:9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

c. Hermeneutics of Revelation by Dispensational Premillennialists

i) Revelation 1-3 refers to the present, Church Age

ii) Key pretrib verse:

Revelation 3:10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, 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.

Again the idea is that God is rescuing the church from suffering in the Tribulation under the Antichrist

iii) Revelation 4:1 represents the rapture of the church...

Revelation 4:1 After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing 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."

iv) of great importance to this view is that the church is not mentioned at all from 4-18, and makes its reappearance at Revelation 19

E. The Predominance of the Pretribulation Rapture Theory

1. the majority of American Evangelicals hold the pretrib view if they hold any view at all
2. it is almost a shibboleth in some seminaries and missions agencies... the idea is that if you don't believe in the pretrib rapture, you don't believe in the literal interpretation of the bible and are probably not an inerrantist
3. however, other pretrib folks take a more balanced view, recognizing legitimate grounds for disagreement

F. Problems with the Pretribulation Rapture Discussed

1. major problem: the secret rapture or two second comings is not clearly taught anywhere in scripture
 - a. all of the verses used to support it can be interpreted in context another way and still be faithful

i) example: “one taken and another left”

Matthew 24:40-42 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. ⁴² "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

ii) 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 is a difficult passage for everyone; to say that it clearly represents the pre-trib rapture is a stretch

iii) Revelation 3:10 seems best to refer to a promise given the church of Philadelphia itself in the first century, and also (by analogy) a general promise to all true churches that God has power to protect them in the midst of whatever tribulations they may face; the Greek does not require that the church be removed from the trial but may refer to the church being protected in the midst of it

ESV Revelation 3:10 Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from (ek) the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.

In Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, He prays this:

ESV John 17:15 I do not ask that you take them out (ek) of the world, but that you keep them from (ek) the evil one.

The same Greek word (*ek*) is used of two different possible strategies that God has to protect His people from danger: evacuation or preservation. Christ chooses the latter in His prayer. So preservation during the Tribulation may look precisely like this:

Isaiah 26:20-21 Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by. ²¹ See, the LORD is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will disclose the blood shed upon her; she will conceal her slain no longer.

- b. the approach to Revelation is not very literal after all, especially on Revelation 4:1... that is a command given to John the Apostle, not to the church; many who follow the pre-trib, pre-millennial approach accuse others who don't of “spiritualizing” texts; but to claim that the churches of Revelation 2-3 represent different eras of church history, and that the command of Revelation 4:1 represents the pretrib rapture is a clear example of spiritualizing
2. the angels are sent for “the elect”... implying that all the elect have come to faith in Christ by then... that implies the rapture occurs when the evangelism is done and the full number of the elect has come in

Matthew 24:31 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.

3. central issue for me: only one “Second Coming of Christ” is taught openly in Scripture, and it is very public, not secret at all

[NASB] *1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.*

Matthew 24:26-31 "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. ²⁷ For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ²⁸ Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. ²⁹ "Immediately after the distress of those days "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' ³⁰ "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. 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.

- a. of special importance... 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, the clearest passage in the bible on the rapture, seems plainly to be describing the Second Coming of Christ
- i) the Lord Himself is descending... He’s coming **down**, namely to earth
 - ii) this seems to speak of the return in glory described in Revelation 19:11-21, the Rider on the White Horse, coming with the armies of heaven to destroy unbelievers
 - iii) also note **“the loud command, the voice of the archangel, the trumpet call of God”** ... those indicate a very public, obvious coming—not just to the elect that are gathered into the clouds
- b. note also someone is making a u-turn... Christ is coming down, the church is going up
- c. Matthew 24:26-30 also speaks of the open, obvious, clear nature of the occasion: it is visible to everyone, everywhere ... “as lightning from the east is visible in the west”, “the sun darkened, “the sign of the Son of Man appears in the sky and all nations will mourn”, “all nations will see him”... after that comes the gathering of the elect by the angels to meet the Lord; though this

4. concerning “tribulation saints” and not receiving wrath...

- a. God has consistently put his people through immense suffering throughout all church history
- b. Daniel 7 says the little horn will war against the saints and defeat them

Daniel 7:21-22 As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, ²² until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

- c. Romans 8, 2 Peter 2 shows God’s power of protecting saints in the midst of suffering while protecting their souls

Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2 Peter 2:7-9 if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men ⁸ (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)-- ⁹ if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

5. concerning the “church” not appearing in Revelation after 4:1, note however that there are “saints”... it is artificial to speak of saints who are not in the church

Revelation 13:7 He [the Beast] was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.

Revelation 13:10 If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

Revelation 14:11-12 There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." ¹² This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

Everywhere else in the NT, the word “saints” refers to Christians generally, to the church of Jesus Christ:

2 Corinthians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia...

1 Corinthians 14:33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints...

Ephesians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus

Quite frankly, then, the argument that the “church” never appears again in Revelation is false.

G. An Appeal for Charitable Discussion

The Pretribulation Rapture of the Church should not be used as a litmus test for biblical fidelity... a variance of views can be supported by faithful bible exegetes

Ephesians 4:3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.