

Session 5

The rapture is the great “catching away” of all those who have trusted Christ - living and dead. The word “rapture” is not found in scripture. It is from the Latin Vulgate (ancient Latin translation of the Bible) “rapere” which means to “catch up.” In 1 Thess 4:17 the Bible states that we will be “caught up” and this is the phrase where the Vulgate used the word “rapere.”

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 is the definitive passage that describes the event we call the rapture.

1 Thess 4:15-18 (NIV) 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. (emphasis added)

The fact that the saints will be raptured is clear in scripture and there has not been much debate on that fact. However, the timing of the rapture has been hotly debated for centuries. So, the question is, when will the rapture occur?



There are three major views as to when the rapture will occur. They are depicted below.



The Pre-Tribulation position is that the rapture will occur at the beginning of Daniel’s 70th Week. In fact, those that hold to this view see the rapture as initiating the 70th Week. The Mid-Tribulation position is that the rapture will occur at the mid-point of the 70th Week when Antichrist demands the world worship him. The Post-Tribulation position is that the rapture will occur at the end of the 70th Week. This position is that the second coming is exactly that - the second coming, that Jesus will return at the battle of Armageddon and rapture his saints. Let us look at each of these views in greater detail in reverse order.

Post-Tribulation Rapture

According to the Post-Tribulation view, the rapture will happen at the battle of Armageddon.

All during the 70th Week, God's wrath will be poured out upon this world.



There are some scriptural problems with this view. The first problem is that according to this view, **God's people endure His wrath**. There are many scriptures that teach the opposite...

Romans 5:9 (NIV) Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall **we be saved from God's wrath** through him! (emphasis added)

1 Thess 1:10 (NIV) and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead-Jesus, **who rescues us from the coming wrath**. (emphasis added)

1 Thess 5:9 (NIV) For **God did not appoint us to suffer wrath** but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. (emphasis added)

Rev 3:10 (NIV) 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. (emphasis added)

Luke 21:36 (NIV) Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to **escape all that is about to happen**, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man. (emphasis added)

There is also a problem about the timing of the rapture. According to the scripture, no one knows the day or the hour when the rapture will occur - not even Jesus - only the Father. Now if the rapture occurs at the battle of Armageddon, then **the day is predictable**. Once the 70th Week begins one must only wait 7 years plus 30 days.

Mark 13:32 (NIV) No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

A third problem is the mere fact that there is not one scripture that clearly specifies this timing for the rapture.

A fourth problem is that there is a conflict in the timing of the Bema Judgment and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb that will follow the judgment. If God's saints are still on earth - how can they participate in the Bema Judgment or the Marriage Supper?

A fifth problem is also a conflict in timing and is indicated in 1 Thessalonians 3:13.

1 Thess 3:13 (NIV) May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy *in the presence of our God* and Father *when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones*. (emphasis added)

If God's people are in His presence WHEN Jesus returns with His holy ones, then it is impossible for His people to be on the earth when Jesus returns!

The resulting problems are pictured below:



Mid-Tribulation Rapture

The Mid-Tribulation rapture position was actually a response to the problems created in the Post-Tribulation view. Because the scripture is so clear about God's people not enduring His wrath, some chose to see the rapture happening at the mid-point of the 70th Week. And this position DID solve some of the problems. If the rapture occurred at the mid-point, then God's people would not suffer God's wrath and the conflict in timing of the Bema Judgment and Marriage Supper of the Lamb are solved - as well as the conflict in 1 Thess 3:13.



However, this position still did not solve the predictability problem. One must still only count 1,260 days after the beginning of the 70th Week. Also, again there is no scriptural basis for the rapture occurring at the mid-point of the 70th Week.

Pre-Tribulation Rapture

By far, the most popular view is the Pre-Tribulation position. This is what has been called the "left-behind" view. According to the Pre-Tribulation view, Jesus will rapture His people at the beginning of the 70th Week. God's people are completely absent from the earth during the 7 years (except those who are saved during the 7 years) while they are going through the Bema Judgment and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Meanwhile, on earth God's wrath is being poured out upon mankind. Many see God's people returning with Jesus at the battle of Armageddon.



During the 70th Week or what is more commonly called “the tribulation period,” this view teaches that some very specific things are happening on the earth. There are three significant events that are specific to this view. First, this view sees the seals, trumpets and bowls as all signifying God’s wrath and that they are poured out upon mankind during the entire 7 years. Second, the 144,000 Jews spoken of in

Revelation chapter seven are seen as Jewish evangelists who will usher in the greatest revival in history - which is the third significant event.



Revelation 7:3 (NIV) “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” **{4}** Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. **{5}** From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, **{6}** from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, **{7}** from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, **{8}** from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000. **{9}** 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 throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

These evangelists and the revival explain the multitude that follow in verse 9. Now the Pre-Tribulation view is the only view that has the proper scriptural balance between the deliverance of God’s people and the punishment of the ungodly through the pouring out of the wrath of God.



Because the scripture declares that God’s wrath will punish the wicked, but God’s people will be “rescued from the coming wrath.”

There are six assumptions that form the basis of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture view. These assumptions are defined as follows:



The first assumption is that the **70th Week is only for the Jewish Nation: Israel and the church are separate entities and God cannot work with both at the same time.**

The Old Testament is for Jews only. I have heard it stated that when Jesus arose from the dead the Jewish clock stopped and the Gentile clock started. When the 70th Week arrives, the Gentile clock will stop and the Jewish clock will start once again. This assumption is based on the scripture in Luke 21...

Luke 21:23 (NIV) How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. **{24}** They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles **until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.** (emphasis added)

This is an assumption because this reasoning does not hold out in scripture. For instance, on the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter spoke to the crowd and applied Old Testament prophecy to describe what was going on with the people who would become the new Christian church.

Acts 2:15 (NIV) These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! **{16}** No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: **{17}** "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. **{18}** Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. **{19}** I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. **{20}** The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. **{21}** And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Furthermore, he quotes the Old Testament prophecy regarding the Day of the Lord - which should be an exclusively Jewish prophecy - and states that on that day "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

The second assumption is that **Matthew chapter 24 was written specifically for the Jews.** This is an assumption because it is not explicitly stated in scripture and it allows the reader to ignore this passage as irrelevant. We would not allow anyone to blatantly ignore any other passage in this same way. The third assumption is that **Revelation 4:1 signifies the rapture.**

Rev 4:1 (NIV) 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."

The Apostle John is exiled on the isle of Patmos, and Jesus appears to him in visions and instructs him to write down what he sees.

In chapter four, John is told to “come up here” to heaven where his vision continues. Most who hold the Pre-Tribulation view see the words “come up here” as signifying the rapture – the catching away into heaven. The door is open in heaven and the voice is like a trumpet. The problem is that this too, is an assumption. The scripture does not indicate, in any way, this symbolism..

In 2 Thessalonians 2:7, the “one who holds him back” is mentioned (in the KJV he is called the “restrainer”) as one who holds back the Antichrist from being revealed until the proper time.

2 Thess 2:6-8 (NIV) 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. **{8}** And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. (emphasis added)

Those who hold to a Pre-Tribulation view adamantly insist that **the “restrainer” is the Holy Spirit**. Therefore, at the rapture He is taken out of the way with the church allowing the Antichrist to be revealed to the world. This, too, is an assumption because scripture does not identify this one “who holds back.”

We have already mentioned the fifth assumption, it is that the **144,000 Jews sealed in Revelation 7 become evangelists**. This is an assumption because nowhere is this stated.

The last assumption is the because of the Jewish evangelists, **the greatest revival in history takes place during the 70th Week**. This is an assumption because nowhere is there any indication that this revival takes place. It is assumed to explain the presence of the multitude that follows.



Rev 7:9 (NIV) 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 throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

Rev 7:13-14 (NIV) Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they,

and where did they come from?" {14} I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

All of these assumptions make sense and fit together. Each assumption can be explained and reasoned - but the sheer number of assumptions causes questions, and promotes the conclusion that this is a view that is forced to fit together.

Pre-Tribulation Problems

In addition to the assumptions, there are some scriptural problems with the Pre-Tribulation view. The first is that scripture mentions explicitly that ***the return of Christ will be unmistakable***. According to the Pre-Tribulation view, the rapture will be only known to those taken to heaven. The rest of the world will know only that multitudes have disappeared. However, scripture indicates on several occasions that when Christ returns it will be obvious.

Mat 24:26-27 (NIV) 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.

Luke 17:23-24 (NIV) Men will tell you, 'There he is!' or 'Here he is!' Do not go running off after them. {24} For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.

Rev 1:7 (NIV) Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.

If the rapture is a "secret" to the world, how could these scriptures be relevant? Some have explained that they are speaking of Jesus' return at the battle of Armageddon. Even with that reasoning, why would Jesus make the distinction of not believing if someone tells you "there he is" or "here he is."

Furthermore, why would Christ have not explicitly told his followers that in the last day they would be raptured, ***and then*** God's wrath would be poured upon the world? ***Why is the pre-tribulation rapture missing from end-time passages?***

Another problem is that according to this view, the Holy Spirit will be absent from the world

having been “taken out of the way” by the rapture of the church. Therefore, how do we explain the ***greatest revival in history and the great multitude saved when the Holy Spirit is no longer in the world?***

Furthermore, scripture tells us that rather than a multitude saved, God will cause those who reject Him to be deluded into delighting in wickedness...

2 Thess 2:10-12 (NIV) ...They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. **{11}** For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie **{12}** and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

We are also told in the book of Revelation that even after suffering God’s wrath people will still not repent.

Rev 9:20 (NIV) The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood-idols that cannot see or hear or walk. (*this is after the 6th trumpet has sounded*)

Rather than a great revival taking place, it seems that people will dive more into wickedness and rejecting God than ever before.

Another problem is the application of **Matthew 24 to only the Jews**. The reasoning is as follows:

- Predicts persecution of God’s people, therefore has to apply to Jews & converts during Tribulation Period
- The Disciples were Jews and so He was speaking to them as Jews

But...

- They were and are a part of the Bride of Christ - what would happen to them is the same as will happen to US!

- We would not allow this with any other passage of scripture!

If there is a pre-tribulational rapture, then according to Matthew 24, there must be **two raptures...**

Matt 24:29-31 (NIV) 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. **{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.

The Son of Man in the clouds, loud trumpet call, send his angels, gather his elect... it sounds a lot like the rapture does it not? Therefore, if the rapture has already happened, there will be another very similar event - supposedly directed at the Jews. The scripture in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 also poses a problem.

2 Thess 2:1,3 (NIV) Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him... **{3}** Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.

This passage begins “concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ **and** our being gathered to Him...” Does this sound like he is speaking of the rapture? Then he goes on to say that “that day” will not come until the “man of lawlessness” (the Antichrist) is revealed. So what comes first? The Antichrist or the rapture?

Last, there is simply no scriptural evidence of Jewish evangelists, revivals, or for the timing of a pre-tribulational rapture.



All of the Pre-Tribulation problem points can be argued...

But the entire picture is still one where all the pieces seem to be forced to fit together!

