

## **“The Rapture of the Church”**

**Intro:** One of the great doctrines of the Scriptures is the Rapture of the Church. Although the word “rapture” does not occur in the Bible, it is the Latin equivalent of the Greek word in 1 Thess. 4:17 for “caught up.” According to John 14:1-3, 1 Cor. 15:50ff, and 1 Thess. 4:13-18, we will be removed from this planet, changed from perishable to imperishable, and live with our Lord Jesus forever. The question is not “Will the rapture take place?” but **“When will the rapture take place?”**

### **I. Millennial Positions:**

- A. Amillennial** = a (no) millennial = there will be no literal 1000 year reign of Christ physically on earth. (Held by Augustine, the Reformers, and the Catholic Church.)
  
- B. Post-Millennial** = the church will preach the gospel, the world will be converted, then after a period of peace with the church ruling, the Lord will come back at the end of this “millennium” of peace and Christianization. (Originally taught by Daniel Whitby, a 17th century Unitarian minister. Modern day Reconstructionism is a form of this.)
  
- C. Pre-Millennial** = the Lord Jesus will come back before the Millennium in great judgment. He will then set up His earthly kingdom that will last 1000 years as described in the Old Testament prophecies and the book of Revelation. This was the position of the early church and is the position of the Evangelical Free Church of America.

The question flowing out of the Pre-Millennial position is **“When does Christ come for His church in relationship to the Tribulation and the Millennium?”** Several views have been proposed:

### **II. RAPTURE POSITIONS:**

- A. Partial Rapture** – held by R. Govett, G.H. Lang, D.M. Panton, G.H. Pender, J.A. Seiss, and Austin Sparks.
  - 1. Major tenets:**
    - Not concerned with the time of the Rapture but the PARTICIPANTS.
    - Only believers who are watching and waiting will go in the Rapture; those who have attained a degree of spiritual readiness that makes them worthy. The rest will stay on earth through the Tribulation.
    - Passages they use are Luke 21:36; Phil. 3:20; Titus 2:13; 2 Tim. 4:8; Heb. 9:28
  - 2. Problems:**
    - Misunderstands the value of Christ’s death which frees the sinner from condemnation and makes him acceptable to God. Propitiation, Reconciliation, and Redemption are devalued.
    - Denies the unity of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12f; Eph. 5:30).
    - Confuses Law and Grace.
  
- B. Post-Tribulational Rapture** - held by Alexander Reese, modified by Robert Gundry.
  - 1. Major tenets**
    - a. Historic View**

- The Church goes through the entire Tribulation, then is raptured as Christ is returning to earth. The Church meets Christ in the air then descends with Him to earth.
- The Church will suffer under Anti-Christ but will be divinely protected from God's wrath by God (like Israel was during the plagues in Egypt).
- Rev. 3:10; Jn. 17:15 = God protects us within the Tribulation, He doesn't take us out.
- Denies dispensationalism and the distinction between the Church and Israel.
- Makes the Rapture and Second Coming one event. Denies the differences in the accounts.
- Denies "Imminence" (Lord can come at any moment) and says "signs" must be fulfilled before He returns.
- Claims the church was promised a Tribulation (Lk. 23:27-31; Mt. 24:9-11; Mk. 13:9-13).
- Claims Dan. 9:24-27 was fulfilled historically.

#### **b. Recent View (Gundry)**

- The Tribulation period is not fundamentally a time of wrath. The wrath of God comes near the end of the period including the bowl judgments and the battle of Armageddon.
- Rapture occurs just before this Divine judgment which covers a brief period of time.

#### **2. Problems:**

- Doesn't deal with the distinction between the Church and Israel in Scripture.
- Fails to deal with passages on Imminence.
- Where do people in natural bodies come from that populate the millennial kingdom?
  - Mt. 25:31-34, 41; 13:40-43, 49; Ezek. 20:38; Jer. 30:20; Is. 65:20 cf. 1 Cor. 15:51-53 – all would have glorified bodies if the Rapture occurred at the end of the Trib.
- Makes the Day of the Lord too narrow (only wrath, no blessing).
  - Zech. 12-14; Zeph. 1:1-2:3; Amos 5:18ff
  - Note: there are a few Pre-Tribulational people who also say the Day of the Lord is only wrath, but they are an extreme minority.
- Why 144,000 Jews in the Tribulation if the Church is Israel?
- Separation of sheep and goats (Mt. 25:31ff) would be redundant if the Church was just raptured prior to this moment.

### **C. Mid-Tribulational Rapture**

#### **1. Major Tenets:**

- The Church is taken at the end of the first 3 1/2 year period of the 70th week of Daniel (Dan. 9:24-27).
- First 3 1/2 years = Satan and Anti-Christ attacking the Church; second 3 1/2 years = Divine wrath.
- Rapture occurs at the sounding of the 7th trumpet and the catching up of the two witnesses (Rev. 11:12).
- Rapture is distinct from the Second Coming.
- No "Imminence."
- "Seals" and "trumpets" are not manifestations of Divine wrath. Seals = man; Trumpets = Satan.

#### **2. Problems:**

- Rev. 6:17 and 11:18 say wrath “has come” (aorist tense) with reference to the seals and trumpets.
- 144,000 if saved in 1st half would become part of the Church and be raptured. But they continue through the Tribulation.
- The signing of the covenant (Dan. 9:24-27) would tell the church when the Rapture would take place (3 1/2 years later), but nobody knows the day or hour.
- Rev. 7:14 says those in white robes have come out of the Great Tribulation, but this is long before the Trumpet judgments, thus still in the first half of the Tribulation according to Mid-Tribulationists.

**D. Pre-Wrath Rapture** – held by Marv Rosenthal and Robert Van Kampen.

**1. Major tenets:**

- A modification of Mid-Trib that says there is a distinction between “The Beginning of Sorrows” (first 3 1/2 years), “The Great Tribulation,” and “The Day of the Lord.”
- “The Tribulation” is not an acceptable term for the seven year period.
- The Day of the Lord is only used of wrath, never blessing.
- The Great Tribulation is not 3 1/2 years long because of Mt. 24:22 - “days shortened” for the sake of the elect. Therefore, it is not 1260 days as God originally designed but shorter. The 70th week is not shortened, just the Great Tribulation.
- The Rapture occurs prior to God’s Wrath which is “The Day of the Lord.”
- 2 Peter 3:10ff is not at the end of the Millennium but just prior to the Millennium. It is not an annihilation of the universe but a destruction (cf. earth “perished” in flood, v. 6).
- The Restrainer of 2 Thess. 2 is Michael the archangel.

**2. Problems:**

- There are blessings in the “Day of the Lord.” (Joel 3:14-16; 2:32 = blessing, then 3:2 = judgment; Zeph. 3:8-13; Is. 35:1-6 has judgment, then blessing, then judgment; Zech. 12-14)
- 2 Peter 3:10 is at the end of the millennium (v. 10 - elements “destroyed” (Grk. luthesetai) burned up; v. 13 = new heavens and earth; Rev. 21 - new heaven and earth AFTER judgment and the millennium - Rev. 19-20.)
- No proof that the Great Tribulation is shortened from 3 1/2 years, yet the entire theory rests upon this.
- God’s wrath is often carried out through human agency (Nebuchadnezzar, etc.).
- Rev. 6:17 - aorist tense wrath “has come” prior to the “Day of the Lord” (8:1).
- It confuses the multiple trumpets of Rev. 8:7ff with the one trumpet of 1 Cor. 15:52 and 1 Thess. 4:16.
- The support for Michael as the Restrainer is inaccurate. The Heb. word ‘amad in Dan. 12:1 does not mean “stand aside” as they claim.

**E. Pre-Tribulational Rapture** – held with minor variations by John Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, Charles Ryrie, Richard Mayhue, John MacArthur...

**1. Major tenets:**

- The Church will be removed from the earth before any portion of the 70th week of Daniel. The 70 weeks were decreed for “your people...” (Dan. 9:24). The church was not involved in the first 69 weeks, it will not be in the 70th.
- It is based on a literal interpretation of Scripture (although all the views claim this).
- The Church and Israel are distinct
  - Church = mystery (Eph. 3:1-7; Rom. 16:25-27; Col. 1:26-28)

- The mystery program will culminate, then God will return to His work with Israel (Rom. 9-11)
- “Imminence” (Jn. 14:2f; Acts 1:11; 1 Cor. 15:51f; Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 1:10; 4:17; 1 Tim. 6:14; James 5:8; 1 Pet. 3:3f. 1 Thess. 5:6; Tit. 2:13; Rev. 3:3 = watch for the Lord Himself, not signs. Imminence was believed by the early church fathers)
- Restrainer of 2 Thess. 2 is the Holy Spirit
- The events after the Rapture and prior to the Millennium require a gap of time: Judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10); Presentation of the Church to Christ (Eph. 5:25-27); Marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19)
- Absence of the word “church” in Rev. 4-18 is a deafening argument of silence. These chapters discuss the Tribulation period and the Church is not mentioned once.
- Absence of mention of “Great Tribulation” for the Church in any of the Epistles of the New Testament.
  - They contain warnings about coming error and false prophets (Acts 20:29f; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 Jn. 4:1-3; Jude 4), ungodly living (Eph. 4:25-5:7; 1 Th. 4:3-8; Heb. 12:1), and they tell believers to endure in the midst of present tribulation (1 Th. 2:13f; 2 Th. 1:4; 1 Peter), but they are totally silent on the Church preparing for the Tribulation Period.
- Entrance of only believers into the Millennial kingdom in natural bodies requires a Rapture before the end of the Tribulation (Mt. 25:31-34, 41; 13:40-43, 49; Ez. 20:38).
  - People in natural bodies in the Millennium (Jer. 30:20; Is. 65:20; Rev. 20:7-10). Children will be born and are able to sin.
- 1 Thess. 4:13-18 – If they believed they would go through a Great Tribulation, they would have expected many to die and would not have been grieved.
- “The Day of the Lord” is a large period of time, not just a specific time of wrath. (Zeph. 1:1 - 2:3 - judgment on the whole world; Jer. 30:7-11 - distress for Israel; 1 Thess. 5:1-11 - no mention of the Church getting ready for distress on that Day, but salvation and comfort - v. 9, 11; Zech. 12-14 - Day of the Lord = cursing and blessing (Tribulation Period and Millennium and Eternal State); Call it “Yahweh’s Day” instead of “Day of Yahweh” and it is easily applied to the entire period;
  - Note: Richard Mayhue does not agree with this point and has written a Doctoral Dissertation on this issue entitled, “The Prophet’s Watchword: The Day Of The Lord.”
- Israel is the primary object of Satan’s wrath in the Tribulation (Rev. 12:4ff; 11:1-3; 13:4f).
- Distinction between the Rapture and the Second Coming: 1 Thess. 4:16f; 1 Cor. 15:51f; Jn. 14:1-3 = Believers go up TO Christ and TO His house (Rapture); Zech. 14:4f; Acts 1:11f; Mt. 24:30f; 25:31f; Rev. 19:11-21 = Christ comes back TO believers ON the earth (2nd Coming)
- Rev. 19:7-9 - The Marriage and Marriage Supper of the Lamb. [see article by Renald E. Showers, Israel My Glory magazine, June/July 1991]
- Rev. 3:10 - “I will also keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth.” This verse is of critical importance in determining the location of the Church during the Tribulation. Posttribulation teachers insist the verse says the Church will be “protected from within or kept through” the Tribulation. Below is a list of arguments supporting a Pretribulation Rapture:
  - “Those who dwell on the earth” = “evil ones” in chs. 4-19 (cf. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 14; 17:8).

- Since “hour of testing” is universal, any escape from it must involve removal. Rev. 6:9-11; 7:14 describe mass persecution of the saints, eliminating immunity or protection theory. Why should some be kept immune and some not?
- If the promise is that they will be “kept through” then Christ is not promising them anything because v. 8f praises them for their perseverance and v. 10 tells them that they are going to get more of the same.
- If promised to be “kept from,” then the admonition to “hold fast” (v. 11) is meaningful (cf. 6:9-11; 7:14).
- Gundry says it should be tāreō apo (away from) instead of tāreō ek to support the Pretribulation position. But the reverse can be said of his position, that it should be tāreō en (in), eis (into, unto), or dia (through) to support his view.
- If “kept through” were meant, John would more likely have used the Greek term “tāreō en” (Acts 12:5; 25:4; 1 Pet. 1:4; Jude 21) instead of “tāreō ek.” In each of those verses it implies previous existence within with a view to its continuation within. If tāreō en means that, what does tāreō ek mean?
- Kept from the “hour” of the trial suggests exemption from the whole period of the testing and not just from the testing itself during the period.
- “Ek” does not always mean “emergence from within” as some have claimed, but also means “position outside of, beyond.” The LXX of Prov. 21:23 uses it to denote outside position (cf. Acts 15:28f; 1 Tim. 4:17; Heb. 5:7; James 5:20).
  - 2 Cor. 1:10 says Paul was rescued by God from (ek) death. This does not mean he emerged from a state of death, but he was rescued from it.
  - 1 Th. 1:10 says Jesus is rescuing us out of (ek) the wrath to come. This is best interpreted as eternal wrath and means we are protected from entering it, not emerging out of it.
- Robert Gundry argues that tāreō ek means “completely kept out of” when it is referring to his “last crises,” but must mean “kept in and guarded from within” if it is in reference to the entire tribulation period. At one moment the Church is kept within, at the other moment it is removed.
- The phrase tāreō ek cannot have any meaning of the idea of “in.” The only other passage in the Bible with these two words together is in John 17:15. According to Gundry, Jn. 17:15 means that the disciples were “in the evil one”; yet in 1 John 5:19 believers are not in the evil one. Jn. 17:15 must mean that they are kept out of the evil one, not that they are protected within the evil one. If they are to be kept outside of the evil one in Jn. 17:15, they must be kept outside of the hour of testing in Rev. 3:10.
- If Rev. 3:10 means immunity or protection within as posttribulationists teach, then contradictions result:
  - If protection is only from God’s wrath, not Satan’s, then Rev. 3:10 denies the request of Jesus in Jn. 17:15.
  - If Rev. 3:10 means total immunity, then of what worth is it since there are multitudes of martyrs in Rev. 6:9-11 and 7:14?

## 2. Problems

- 1 Thess. 5:1-11; 2 Thess. 2 -- these passages could appear to teach that the Church will be around at the time of the Day of the Lord.
- Many of the arguments for Pretrib. are those of “silence” (Rev. 4-18, etc.).
- Absence of teaching on this subject by the early church fathers.

## CONCLUSION:

This is a very complicated issue because there are so many passages in the Bible that address it. Due to the extreme volume of passages that must be studied, many students jump to conclusions and make the passages fit their preconceived ideas. It becomes easier to defend a system than to wrestle with the proper interpretation of individual passages. This should be a good warning for all of us to be like the noble Bereans who “received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). It should also be a good warning that we should not be quick to judge others who hold a different view than we do regarding the Rapture. Godly men and women disagree and we need to do so with grace.

The main message to all people of every view on this issue should be that we need to BE READY for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. How do we do that?

1. Make sure you truly know Jesus as your Lord and Savior so you go with Him when He comes.
2. Comfort others with the constant reminder that the Lord is coming back for us and we need not hopelessly grieve for those who have fallen asleep in Him (I Th. 4:13-18).
3. Encourage and build up one another so we may all be alert and sober (I Th. 5:1-11).
4. Proclaim the Word, teach sound doctrine, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry, fight the good fight, finish the course, keep the faith, and love His soon appearing (2 Tim. 4:1-8).
5. Be holy and godly, looking for and hastening the day when God comes and judges evil once and for all (2 Pet. 3:10ff).
6. Abide in Christ so when He returns we will have confidence and not shame (I Jn. 2:28).
7. Be pure even as Jesus is pure, because when He returns we will be like Him (I Jn. 3:1-3).

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON THE RAPTURE:**

1. If one TRULY believed in the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ, how would it impact his / her life? Be specific:

\* Personal Holiness                      \* Passion for God and His Kingdom                      \* Prayer Life

\* Personal Finances                      \* Personal Evangelism                      \* Participation in Ministry

2. Are you currently living that way?

\* Tell specifically how you are

\* Tell specifically where you need to change / improve

3. If Jesus came back today, is there anything in your life that you would be ashamed of?

\* Personal Life                      \* Family Life

\* Business Life                      \* Recreation / Leisure

4. What are you doing each day to be “READY” for the coming of our Lord Jesus?

5. Make a list of FIVE people you can pray for and then tell about our Lord Jesus.