

THERE WILL BE A PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE

IN MODERN TIMES many Christians reject the idea that there will be a Rapture. The idea that Jesus will suddenly return, remove the Church from the world, and then judge the world for its sins has fallen out of favor.

That is unfortunate, because there is a lot of Biblical support for it. Let's start at the beginning. After the Last Supper took place and Judas left to betray Jesus, the Lord told His disciples that He was about to leave them. He told them not to be afraid because He had a reason for leaving them:

John 14:1: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

2 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.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

In other words, Jesus was going away so He could prepare a place for His disciples. Once He finished He would come back and get them so that they could be with Him forever.

In ancient Jewish courtships, after the bride and groom

were engaged the groom would leave his bride-to-be and go prepare a home for the two of them to live in. After he completed it he would return for his bride and they would be married. Jesus is doing the same thing for us. (It's not for nothing that the Church is called the Bride of Christ!)

In verse 28 Jesus tells us where He is going:

John 14:28: “Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.”

Jesus said that He was going to His father, and one day He would come back and get His Church. This is all very straightforward: Jesus left to prepare a home for us, and one day He will come back and get us. There is nothing complicated about this.

The next passage of interest is found in I Thessalonians:

I Thessalonians 4:13: “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be

caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

This passage goes into more detail about the time when Jesus will return for His Church. The apostle Paul tells us that those who were part of the Church but have died will be raised from the dead – their bodies will be brought back to life. (That, after all, is what “resurrection” means. In order to have a resurrection you must first have something that died, and it then has to come back to life. When we die the only part of us that stops living is our bodies. *That* is what gets raised from the dead when Jesus returns.) After the dead have been resurrected, the living saints will be transformed. In an instant they will become immortals, and all that is sinful or unclean about them will be banished forever. Next, everyone will meet Christ in the air, after which we will “ever be with the Lord”.

So here we have a picture of what it will be like when Jesus returns for the Church. There will be a resurrection of the dead, a putting on of immortality, and a grand meeting in the air. After this has happened we will “ever be with the Lord”. This passage adds a lot of detail to Christ's return, but it doesn't give us any information about its timing. When does this happen in relation to other end-times events? Based on this passage alone we cannot say, but there are other verses that provide some additional context for the Rapture.

Incidentally, the word “rapture” comes from verse 17. The Latin translation of the phrase “caught up” is very similar to the word “rapture”. For centuries the only version of the Bible that was commonly available was the Latin version, and that is where this word came from. When people speak of the Rapture they are speaking of the time when the Church will be “caught up” to meet the Lord in the air. (This is why it is unfair to say that the word “rapture” never appears in the Bible. It actually does

appear in *Latin* Bibles because it's a Latin word.)

There really should be no debate among Christians about whether or not there will be a Rapture. The Bible is quite clear that one day we will be “caught up” (or “raptured”) to meet our Lord in the air. The only real question is one of timing – when does this happen? Is this the same thing as the Second Coming that is spoken of in Matthew 24 (which Jesus said happens after the time of “great tribulation”), or is it something separate?

The next passage can be found in I Corinthians:

I Corinthians 15:50: “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

51 Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

57 But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye

steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

This passage also speaks of the resurrection. Those who have believed in Jesus but died before His return will be raised from the dead (meaning, as we said earlier, that their dead bodies will be raised back to life). Next, those who are still alive will be transformed: the mortal will put on immortality and we will be changed. (Some additional details about this can be found in I Corinthians 15:35-49). These teachings are quite clear and are not tied to any particular interpretation of end-times. The verses simply teach that one day the Lord will return and get His Church, and they will be forever with Him. However, this still does not answer the question about when this occurs. Does this happen before, during, or after the time of “great tribulation” that Jesus spoke about in Matthew 24:41?

Before we can answer that question we need to understand what the Church is. The Church is a new institution that cannot be found in the Old Testament. The Church began on the day of Pentecost and will be completed at the Rapture. Before Pentecost there were Old Testament saints, but none of them were a part of the Church. How do we know this? Well, John the Baptist referred to himself as a friend of the bridegroom (John 3:29); *he did not consider himself to be a part of the Bride*. John was beheaded before the day of Pentecost occurred, so although he was saved he was not a part of the Church. The word “church” never appears in the Old Testament, and the reason for this is because the Church is a new concept that began *after* the death and resurrection of Christ. There was no such thing as the Church before the day of Pentecost.

When the Lord returns at the Rapture He will gather the Church to Himself and the Church will then be gone. Since the Church is being taken to Heaven, they will obviously no longer be

on the Earth. It's worth noting that the Church appears in Revelation 1-3, which takes place *before* the Tribulation, but there is no mention of the Church being on Earth in Revelation 6-18, which takes place *during* the Tribulation. There are saints mentioned in chapters 6-18 but they are never referred to as the Church (just as the saints in the Old Testament are never referred to as the Church). *Nowhere* does the Bible speak of the Church going through the Tribulation.

This, however, is not the strongest evidence that the Rapture takes place before the Tribulation. In Luke 21 Jesus says this:

Luke 21:34: "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

35 For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.

36 Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."

This passage is one of the strongest evidences for placing the Rapture before the Tribulation. The Lord said that the Tribulation will be a snare to *all* those who dwell on the *whole Earth*. In other words, *everyone who is on Earth will be forced to suffer through it*. However, the Lord tells us to watch and pray so that we can escape this time of suffering that will afflict *everyone on the entire planet*. If it afflicts everyone on the planet with no exceptions, then the only way to escape it is to *not be on the planet*. If we should pray so we can escape it, then we must be praying that the Lord will come and get us before it happens! This strongly implies that the Rapture will occur prior to the

Tribulation and will remove the Church from Earth.

Some people get upset at Christians who teach a pre-Tribulation Rapture, and accuse them of being easy-living Christians who just don't want to suffer for Christ. It's worth noting that Jesus *commands* His disciples to pray that we won't go through this period. He *did not want His children to endure it*. Praying to escape the Tribulation is not evidence of a weak will; it is *obedience to the command of Christ*.

There are others who say that “watch and pray” means that only the “worthy” will escape the Tribulation, and all “carnal” Christians will have to endure it. That is not what Jesus is talking about! The Lord is not going to leave part of His Bride behind for any reason. When the Church is complete *all* of it will be brought home. What Jesus is talking about are people who think they are saved but are not. Jesus spent a lot of time warning people to examine themselves to see if they were in the faith. All of those who are saved will be in the Rapture, but not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” is among the saved. That is the point.

I Thessalonians expands upon this idea of a pre-Tribulation Rapture:

I Thessalonians 5:1: “But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of

darkness.

6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.

9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.”

First of all, it's important to note that in this passage Paul is talking about the “day of the Lord” (verse 2), which is *not* Judgment Day. The “day of the Lord” is a phrase used throughout Scripture that refers to the Tribulation. (Many Old Testament passages talk about the Tribulation, but that is outside the scope of this chapter.) Paul is warning the Thessalonian church that the Tribulation will catch the lost world by surprise, and they will not escape it. However, Paul goes on to say that the Church is not in darkness and will *not* be surprised. While the world will be caught up in the Tribulation, the Church will not because *it was not appointed to wrath*. In this context the word “wrath” is not referring to Judgment Day (since that is not what's being discussed!) but is instead the wrath that God will pour out upon the world during the Tribulation. The world will have to endure that terrible period of time, but the Church will be spared.

In verse 9 Paul mentions the “hope of salvation”. This is not salvation from our sins – after all, that is *not* a hope. Christ has already forgiven our sins and paid our debt with His own blood. Besides, Paul is not discussing salvation from our sins. The “hope of salvation” is salvation from the wrath that is mentioned

in the first verses of this chapter – *the wrath of the Tribulation*. This passage provides clear, direct evidence that God has not appointed His Church to suffer through the wrath of the Tribulation. Instead He will deliver us from it – and since the Tribulation will afflict *everyone* on the *whole Earth*, He must be planning to take His Church *out* of the Earth before the Tribulation begins! Since the Marriage of the Lamb takes place in Heaven *before* the Tribulation ends (see Revelation 19:7), that is even more evidence that the Church must be in Heaven during the Tribulation. Given that the Rapture is what moves the Church to Heaven, the Rapture must happen before the Tribulation.

Another mention of this same idea can be found in Revelation 3:10:

Revelation 3:10: “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”

In this passage the Tribulation is the hour of trial that will try everyone that dwells upon the Earth. Notice that this passage does not say that the Church will be kept *safe* during this hour of trial, but that *it will be kept from the hour of trial altogether*. Given that the verse goes out of its way to explain that the Tribulation impacts *all the world* in order to afflict *everyone that lives on the Earth*, this is more evidence that the Church will not be on the Earth when the Tribulation happens.

Some have said “Oh, that just means the Church will be protected from persecution during that period”. If you read the rest of Revelation you will see how ludicrous that claim really is. God gives the Beast the power to make war with the saints and overcome them (Revelation 13:7), and the beast kills *millions* of believers. There is no possible way that “being kept safe” is the

same thing as “the antichrist will hunt you down and behead you”. The *Church* is kept safe because it's not on the Earth and is therefore out of the antichrist's reach. However, all those who come to Christ after the Rapture are not part of the Church and are not kept safe. Millions of them will be hunted down and brutally murdered.

How close are we to the Rapture? Well, the Bible teaches that the Rapture can happen at any moment. For example:

Romans 13:11: “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.”

The salvation mentioned in this verse cannot be referring to salvation from sins, because that was finished when Christ died in the cross. Salvation from sins is *not* something that we are still looking forward to in the future. Paul is speaking of salvation from the Tribulation and being saved from the hour of wrath that will come upon the whole Earth. *That* salvation is “nearer than when we believed”. The imagery in these two verses depicts something that is drawing closer and is near at hand. You can almost hear Paul saying “It won't be long now”. Nowhere does he say that other things must happen first. It can literally happen at any moment. There are no other signs or events that must take place before the Rapture happens.

James 5 also speaks of this:

James 5:7: “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of

the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

8 Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the Judge standeth before the door."

Like Paul, James says that the coming of the Lord is drawing near and he urges us to be patient until Jesus comes. James goes so far as to say that "the Judge standeth before the door". If He is standing at the door then He is very near indeed! Revelation also makes this same point:

Revelation 22:20: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen, Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Even Jesus says that He is coming quickly! This can only be true if the Rapture happens before the Tribulation. If the Rapture happens in the middle of the Tribulation then it is always at least 3.5 years away. If it happens at the end of the Tribulation then it's at least 7 years away. In neither case is the Rapture imminent. It is only imminent if it occurs *before* the Tribulation.

The Bible does not say exactly when the Rapture will happen. What it does say is that the coming of the Lord is drawing near and we should be sober and watch for it.

