

BIBLICAL EVIDENCES FOR THE PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE¹

INTRODUCTION: The main views regarding the “*Rapture*”² of the Church in regard to the Tribulation are: “*Pre-Trib*,” “*Mid-Trib*” (with a variation called the “*Pre-Wrath Rapture*”), and “*Post Trib*.” **This writer maintains that the correct theological position is the Pre-Tribulation Rapture position**, and strongly holds to the Pre-Trib view. However he would add (along with many of the strongest advocates of each of those theological positions mentioned above) that an attitude of Christian love and charity should be maintained on this issue.

The key *Pre-Trib* biblical passages: John 14:1-3; I Cor. 15:51-58 & I Thess. 4:13-18.

1. The Promise to be “*kept from the hour of trial*” – Rev. 3:10. cf. I Thess. 1:10; 4:13-18; & 5:9. “If this passage in Revelation 3:10 only means that the Church will be kept safe through the tribulation as some have taught, then you have a major problem on your hands! The problem is this: all through the tribulation, ‘saints’ are being killed on a massive scale (see Rev. 6:9-11; 11:7; 12:30, 17; 13:7, 10, 15; 14:13; 17:6; 18:24). **If these martyrs are church-age saints, then they are *not* being kept safe and the promise to the Church in Revelation 3:10 is in error &/or is meaningless.** Only as we distinguish between the Church-age saints and the tribulation saints, does the promise of Revelation 3:10 make any sense.”³

2. The removal of the “*residence aspect*” of the Holy Spirit requires the removal of the Church as well – II Thess. 2:6-8. While the Holy Spirit will still be present and working during the Tribulation (otherwise how would anyone get saved during that time?), however it appears that He will no longer be residing in believers as He has throughout the NT period or “Church Age.” Instead, it seems that He will be operating more as He did in OT times. So if the Holy Spirit is who is being referred to in this passage, and He is removed, then all those believers whom He is permanently residing in, must, of necessity, leave as well.

3. The promise to the Church to be *preserved from “wrath”* – Rev. 6:17 cf. I Thess. 1: 9-10; 5:4, 5, 8, 9; Rev. 3:10. The Tribulation is a time of the outpouring of the wrath of God, and the church is exempt from wrath – cf. **I Thess. 1:10; 4:13-18; Rev. 6:16-17; 11:18; 14:10; 15:1; 16:1.** “*The term ‘wrath’ is never used in the Bible to refer to ‘Hell’ or ‘The Lake of Fire.’ The use of the word ‘wrath’ refers to God’s wrath against sin which is specifically poured out during the Great Tribulation...Remember, there is a difference between the wrath of the world against the Church, and the wrath of God against the world...The Church will face tribulation in the world from the Satanic world system. Satan is the one behind these attacks on the Church... (Eph. 6:12)... [but] the Great Tribulation, manifesting the wrath of God, originates not from Satan, but from God, and is not directed towards the Church, but towards a rebellious world...The word ‘wrath’ in the Bible can refer to God’s general wrath against sin (as in Romans 1:18), and also of God’s wrath which will be poured out in the Great Tribulation (Rev. 6:17; 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1).*”⁴

“*Who will experience the wrath of God? ...The ungodly and unrighteous (Rom. 1:18), children of wrath (Eph. 2:3), Sons of disobedience (Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6), Babylon the Great (Rev. 16:19), The Nations (Rev. 19:15), Israel (Jer. 30:4-7; Zech. 13:8-9) [and] the Tribulation Saints (Rev. 13:7-10)...The purpose of this Great Tribulation caused by the outpouring of God’s wrath is fourfold:*

Compiled & written by Rev. Mike Edwards, April, 2008, St. Vincent, West Indies (revised 3/09, 5/12 & 12/13). This abridged & revised version Madison, Ohio, Dec, 2013. All material in parentheses () appears that way in the originals, all words in brackets [] and all bolding & underlining has been added by me. –*mve*.

² “Rapture is a state or experience of being carried away... The English word comes from a Latin word, *rapio*, which means ‘to seize or be carried away in one’s spirit,’ or the actual removal from one place to another... But is this a biblical term? Yes. The Greek word from which we take this term rapture appears in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and is translated ‘caught up.’ The Latin translation of this verse uses the word *rapturo*, from which we derive our English word rapture. So it is a biblical term that has come to us through the Latin translation of 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The original Greek word in that verse is *harpazo*. Like the Latin word it also means to snatch or take away, and it occurs 13 times in the New Testament. It describes how the Spirit caught up Philip near Gaza and brought him to Caesarea (Acts 8:39). Paul used it to describe his experience being caught up to the third heaven, whether in or out of his body (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). Thus there can be no doubt that it is describing an actual removal of people from earth to heaven when it is used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 of the rapture of the church.” –From: Charles C. Ryrie, “*Come Quickly Lord Jesus-What You Need to Know About the Rapture*” (Harvest House Publishers: Eugene, Oregon, 1996), pp. 29-30.

³ J. Mark Martin, “*Will the Church go Through the Tribulation?*” (Calvary Community Church, Phoenix, Arizona, 1995?), p. 9

⁴ Martin, pp. 3, 5

- a. "To test those who dwell upon the earth – Rev. 3:10
- b. "That God might pour out His wrath on the wicked – Rev. 15:7
- c. "To destroy those who destroy the earth – Rev. 11:18
- d. "To purge the nation of Israel – Dan. 11:35; Zech. 13:8-9."⁵

4. The argument from *Imminency*. i.e. **The Rapture can be imminent** (i.e. can occur at any moment) *only if it is Pre-Tribulational* – I Thess. 5:6 cf. Jas. 5:7-9; I Pet. 4:7; Heb. 10:24-25, 37; I Jn. 2:18, 28; Col. 3:4; 2 Tim. 4:8. All of these verses clearly teach that NT believers need to be ready for Christ to return at any moment. However, if the rapture is post-tribulational, then believers will enter the tribulation and thus would be able to figure out approximately when Christ will return. Most importantly, Christ's coming would not & could not occur "at any moment."

MacArthur makes some helpful comments:

"The New Testament writers often wrote of Christ's 'appearing,' and they never failed to convey the sense that this could happen imminently... (I John 2:28; cf. 3:2; Col. 3:4; 2 Tim. 4:8; 1 Pet. 5:4). All those texts suggest that in the early church, expectation of Christ's imminent return ran high. A solid conviction that Christ could return at any time permeates the whole New Testament. When the apostle Paul described the Lord's coming for the church, he used personal pronouns that show he clearly was convinced he himself might be among those who would be caught up alive to meet the Lord: 'We who are alive and remain... we who are alive and remain...' (I Thess. 4:15, 17). He obviously looked for Christ to return in his lifetime... the New Testament is permeated with an eager sense of expectancy and conviction that the blessed hope of Christ's return [i.e. the Rapture] is imminent. On the other hand, we are warned about trouble and affliction that will precede Christ's return. How can we reconcile these two threads of prophecy?

"...Several points must be borne in mind. **First**, all the general 'signs of the times' given in the New Testament *have* been fulfilled and *are being* fulfilled before our eyes. They are, in fact, characteristics of the entire church age. Apostasy and unbelief, self-love and sin, wars, rumors of wars, and natural disasters have all been common throughout the church age... The church was *already* in the last days even before the apostolic era ended. In fact, 'last days' is a biblical term for the Christian era itself (Heb. 1:1-2)... **Second**, nothing in the New Testament ever suggests we should defer our expectation of Christ's appearing until other preliminary events occur. The one apparent exception is 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3... But look carefully at the context of 2 Thessalonians 2. The Thessalonian Christians had been confused and upset by some false teachers... who were teaching that the persecutions and sufferings they were currently experiencing were the very judgments associated with *the Day of the Lord*. (That expression always refers to a time of apocalyptic judgment; cf. Isa. 13:9-11; Amos 5:18-20; I Thess. 5:2-3; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 6:17; 16:14)

"...But now, in a time of severe persecution and trial, the Christians at Thessalonica had fallen prey to the false idea that God was already pouring out His final wrath—and that *they* were among the objects of that wrath. They obviously feared they had missed the Rapture... So Paul wrote, 'Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled...' The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him' is a clear reference to the *Rapture*. 'The day of Christ' is *the Day of the Lord*... So when Paul says, 'that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition' (2 Thess. 2:3) he is talking about the Day of the Lord and its apocalyptic judgment, not the Rapture. He was not suggesting that the coming of Christ for the church would be delayed until after the Tribulation events had all played out. He was certainly not suggesting that the Thessalonians should defer their hope of Christ's coming for them until the end of the Tribulation. He had spent his entire first epistle urging them to be watchful and expectant and to encourage one another with the news of Christ's imminent return (cf. 1 Thess. 1:10; 4:14-18; 5:6, 9, 11). If the apostle now meant to teach them that all the events of the Tribulation must be fulfilled *before* Christ could return for them, that would be scant 'comfort' indeed. In fact, it would overturn everything the New Testament has to say about Christ's return being imminent, comforting, and hopeful.

⁵ Martin, pp. 3-4

“So the consistent teaching of the New Testament is that Christians should be looking for the imminent coming of Christ for His church, and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 is no exception... The Judge is still at the door. The day is still at hand. There are no other events that must occur on the prophetic calendar before Christ comes to meet us in the air. He could come at any moment. And it is in *that* sense that Christ’s coming is imminent. In the very same sense, His coming was imminent even in the days of the early church.”⁶

5. The “70 Weeks” of Daniel have reference to Israel, *not* the Church (i.e. “The People”). The first 69 “weeks” didn’t apply to the Gentiles, so why should the 70th? Cf. Rom. 11:17-29, esp. vv. 25-26. “Actually the question boils down to whether the church is a distinct entity in the program of God. **Those who emphasize the distinctiveness of the church will be pretribulationists, and those who de-emphasize it will usually be posttribulationists.** Distinctiveness here means distinct from Israel. **Is the church distinct from Israel? If so, then the church will not be a participant in the Tribulation, since during that time God will be dealing primarily with Israel once again.** If the church is a continuation of Israel, then we could more readily conclude that she will experience the Tribulation. The ‘mystery’ character of the church argues against her being related to Israel and for her being a distinct entity in God’s program. God’s work in this age of including Jews and Gentiles in the same body is a mystery that was not known in past ages (Eph. 3:3-6; Col. 1:26). But the Tribulation was revealed in the Old Testament (Isa. 24). Furthermore, Daniel’s prophecy concerning the 70 weeks of sevens specifically concerned ‘*your people and your holy city*’ (Dan. 9:24). All 70 weeks related to Israel. **The church had no part in the already fulfilled 69 weeks and will not be a part of the seventieth week of the future Tribulation.** This will require a pretrib rapture. Of course other mysteries in the Bible related to other time periods... [But] to use this as proof that the mystery of the body of Christ cannot be related only to the period from Pentecost to the rapture is fallacious. Clearly, not all biblical mysteries relate to the church age, but that does not prove that one of them does not.”⁷

6. The Church does not appear in the book of Revelation after the beginning of the Tribulation description – Rev. 4:1.

Ryrie comments:

“Pretribulationists consider it a significant support to their view that **the church is not mentioned even once by name in Revelation 4-18, chapters that describe the Tribulation on earth.** By contrast, the word church occurs 19 times in chapters 1, 2, and 3, once in chapter 22, and the phrase ‘*wife of the Lamb*’ once in chapter 21. Yet in chapters 4-18 there is a silence about the church, which indicates to pretribulationists that the church will not be present on the earth during the Tribulation years...

“Posttribulationists disagree...[& give] three reasons: **1)** If the church is supposed to be in heaven during the events recorded in chapters 4-18, why is it not mentioned as being there? **2)** The occurrence of the word saints in 13:7, 10; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24 show that the church is indeed on the earth during the Tribulation. **3)** Other descriptions of believers in the Tribulation aptly apply to church-age believers; therefore, Tribulation believers will be the last generation of church-age believers, and that last generation will go through the Tribulation.

“[By way of rebuttal] pretribulationists answer the first of the above posttrib arguments along either or both of two lines:

A) “**Most identify the 24 elders as representing the church, and since they are seen in heaven in Revelation 4:4 and 5:8-10, the church is mentioned as in heaven.** Some think this argument is no good because the critical text of 5:9-10 has the elders singing about redemption in the third person, as if redemption were not their own experience (thus they could not represent the church, which has been redeemed). But this is a weak argument; after all, Moses sang of redemption in the third person, right after he experienced it (Ex. 15:13, 16, 17).

(cont.)

⁶ John F. MacArthur, “*The Second Coming – Signs of Christ’s Return and the End of the Age*” (Crossway Books: Wheaton, IL, 1999), pp. 51-52, 54-57. (all italicizing appears as such in the original, with the exception of the third paragraph, which has been added-*mwe*) See also chapter 7, “*The Imminent Coming of Christ*” in Renald Showers, “*Maranatha – Our Lord, Come!*” (The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc: Bellmawr, NJ, 1995),

⁷ Ryrie, pp. 69-70

“B) Pretribulationists also point out that Hebrew marriage customs argue for the church’s being in heaven before the coming of Christ at the end of the Tribulation. Jewish marriage included a number of steps: **first**, *betrothal* (which involved the prospective groom’s traveling from his father’s house to the home of the prospective bride, paying the purchase price, and thus establishing the marriage covenant); **second**, *the groom’s returning to his father’s house* (which meant remaining separate from his bride for 12 months, during which time he prepared the living accommodations for his wife in his father’s house); **third**, *the groom’s coming for his bride at a time not known exactly to her*; **fourth**, *his return with her to the groom’s father’s house to consummate the marriage and to celebrate the wedding feast for the next seven days* (during which the bride remained closeted in her bridal chamber). In Revelation 19:7-9 the wedding feast is announced, which, if the analogy of the Hebrew marriage customs means anything, assumes that the wedding has previously taken place in the father’s house. Today the church is described as a virgin waiting for her bridegroom’s coming (2 Cor. 11:2). In Revelation 21:9 she is designated as the wife of the Lamb, indicating that previously she has been taken to the groom’s father’s house. **Pretribulationists say that this requires an interval of time between the rapture and the second coming.** Granted, it does not say seven years’ time, but it certainly argues against the posttrib view, which leaves virtually no time between the rapture and second coming.

In response to objection #2 above, pretribulationists point out that... “**The appearance of the word saints in chapters 4-18 does not prove anything until you know what saints they are.** There were saints (godly ones) in the Old Testament (Ps. 85:8); there are saints today (1 Cor. 1:2); there will be saints in the Tribulation years (Rev. 13:7). The question is, Are the saints of this church age distinct from saints of the Tribulation period (i.e. a pre-trib rapture) or not (a post-trib rapture)? The uses of the word do not answer the question.”⁸

7. The Tribulation is “the time of Jacob’s Trouble” and thus pertains to Israel, not the Church – Dan. 12:1; Jer. 30:4-7

8. The populating of the Millennial kingdom strongly argues for a Pre-trib rapture – Isa. 65:20; Zech. 8:5; Rev. 20:8 cf. Mt. 25:34; Zech. 14:11; Ezek. 20:38; Isa. 19:24-25. “The Millennium not only involves the reign of Jesus Christ with His people, who will then have resurrected bodies. It also includes His reign over people on this earth who will not have resurrected bodies. If there were only resurrected saints in the millennial kingdom, then there would be no death, no increase in population, and no differences in the ages of millennial citizens (all of which are indicated as characterizing the kingdom). Since resurrected people do not propagate, there would be no way to populate this kingdom unless some unresurrected people enter the Millennium. Thus **all premillennialists see the need to have some adults who survive the Tribulation.** They are not taken to heaven at the end of the Tribulation, but enter the Millennium in unresurrected bodies to become the first parents of the millennial population.”⁹ **Consequently, if the rapture occurs at the end of the tribulation, then there would be virtually no believers in mortal bodies to go on into the millennium and repopulate the earth.** But if the rapture is pre-tribulationary, with thousands of individuals becoming believers during the seven year tribulation, this potential problem is resolved.

⁸ Ryrie, pp. 65-70

⁹ Ryrie, pp. 85-86