

The Pre-Tribulation Rapture

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There are many views about the rapture, what it is and when it will take place. This study is concerned with presenting a Biblical view of the occurrence and its timing in relation to another future event, the Tribulation.

The Rapture

The Rapture is a term used by evangelical Christians for the event described in **I Thessalonians 4 vv 14-17**:

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. 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 go before them which are asleep. 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: 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 “catching up” or, representing the Greek more literally, “snatching away”, is the rapture. It is the physical removal of all true Christians from the earth at the start of Christ’s second coming. **I Corinthians 15 vv 51-53** explains the miraculous transformation that will take place to make this possible:

“Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 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. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

This is the initial stage of the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to the earth. As He comes, He will call out all those who are His to meet Him in the air, so that when, in the final stages, He returns to the earth itself, He will be seen coming with all His saints. (**I Thess. 4v v14; Jude 14**)

The Tribulation

In ancient times, as the consequence of their own sin and disobedience, God’s earthly people Israel, have suffered times of chastisement. There have been times when they have not been counted as the people of God. For instance, during the times of the Judges, in times of wilful disobedience and idolatry, God gave His people into the hands of their enemies. When they repented and called on the Lord, He sent them deliverers or saviours – the Judges. However, those years of disobedience, when they were not owned as the people of God, were not included in God’s reckoning. In **I Kings 6 v 1** God’s account is set out:

“And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, ...that he began to build the house of the Lord.”

Yet, if you count the years, as given in the Bible, from the Exodus until that time, you will find that it comes to nearly six hundred years. The ancient Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, in his coverage of this period of the history of the Jews, and in his parallel passage to **I Kings 6 v 1**, states that it is 592 years (“The Antiquities of the Jews” Book VIII ch.3.1). Why is there an additional 112 years? You will find that this is the total of the years of disobedience in the Judges when they were not reckoned as God’s people.

In a later time of national disobedience, God warned his people through the prophet Hosea that they would be Lo-Ruhamah – “not having obtained mercy” – and Lo-Ammi – “not my people.” (**Hosea 1**) Why do we need to know this? Well, in **Daniel chapter 9** there is the prophecy of the Seventy Weeks: **“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and sixty two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after sixty two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for Himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.”** (Daniel 9 vv 24-27)

It would be better to refer to these “weeks” as “heptads” (i.e. groups of seven) since they are not weeks of days but weeks of years. The seventy weeks are, therefore, in total, 490 years and will run until the people of Israel are finally reconciled to God and made partakers of everlasting righteousness. However, they do not run continuously. The 490 year clock began to run when Artaxerxes gave the command to Nehemiah to restore and rebuild Jerusalem in 445 BC (Nehemiah 2 v 5). The building of the walls of Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah, “even in troublous times” was completed 49 years later (7 weeks) and after another 434 years (62 weeks) Jesus was crucified for our sins – Messiah was cut off, but not for Himself. ¹

“He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.” (John 1 v 11). Following the rejection of the Messiah by His own people, the Gospel of Christ has been preached to all nations. The clock, as far as this prophecy of God’s dealing with His earthly people Israel is concerned, has been put on hold. At this present time they are “Lo-Ammi” – “not my people”. Nevertheless, God has not cast away His people. (**Romans 11 v1, 2**) There are still seven years (1 week) of the clock left to run. Now we are in the age of the gospel of God’s grace, the age of the Church, the age of the Holy Spirit. When the Rapture has taken place at the end of the Church age, then the clock will begin to run again. During that time of seven years, there will be tribulation for the people of Israel. The events of those seven years are described in the book of **The Revelation** and are alluded to elsewhere in Scripture. Jeremiah prophesied of that time that it would be “even the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.” (**Jeremiah 30 v 7**) Both in Daniel and in The Revelation it is made clear that the “week” will be divided into two parts of 3½ years each (time, times and an half, 1260 days, 42 months). The dividing point comes when “he” (that is the “prince that shall come”) “shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease” – “in the midst of the week”. The people of this prince were the Romans for they were the nation which was responsible for the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and of the Temple in 70AD. “The prince that shall come”, therefore will emerge from the latter day manifestation of the Roman Empire - at the moment known as the European Union, which is based on the Treaty of Rome 1957. He is the Antichrist, which is a term which can be used both of the “beast” (**Rev 13 v 1**) and the False Prophet (**Rev 13 v 11; Rev 19 v 20**). Both are manifestations of the satanic presence on earth during the tribulation period. In Greek (depending on the case which follows it) “anti” can mean “against” (as it does in English) or it can mean “instead of”. The “beast” will be manifestly against Christ and God; the false prophet will be a false Christ, usurping the place of Christ as an intermediary and seeking to deceive the people of Israel. In II Thessalonians he is “the man of sin” and “the son of perdition”. In **Daniel 8 v9** he is “the little horn” arising from one of the four kingdoms that the Greek Empire was divided into following the death of Alexander the Great.

¹ The 490 years are prophetic years of 360 days. Hence 3½ years = 1,260 days or 42 months of 30 days each. Thus the 483 years from the command to rebuild until the crucifixion of Jesus are 483 x 360 days = 173,880 days. To convert to our solar years, divide by 365.25. 173,880 ÷ 365.25 = 476 years. That will bring us to about 30AD.

During the first 3½ year period, God's two anointed witnesses will be prophesying with power. After 1,260 days (3½ prophetic years) they will be killed by the beast. Their dead bodies will lie in the street for 3½ days after which they will be resurrected and ascend into heaven. (**Revelation 11**) Then the prophesied abomination of desolation will occur right there in the middle of the week. From that time, warned Jesus, "shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." (**Matthew 24 v 21**) Yet out of it will come saints, particularly of Israel, who have realised what is happening, and who will make their stand for God and His kingdom. It is "the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it." They will proclaim the gospel of that Kingdom, that God is the Sovereign Lord. This will be a bold declaration against the satanic hosts of that time when the Holy Spirit's influence will no longer be present. Remember, the presence of Spirit-filled Christians will have gone. They will have been raptured. The tribulation saints will endure to the end; they will be faithful unto death. John saw them as he received The Revelation of Jesus Christ:

"And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, 'What are these which are arrayed in white robes? And whence came they?'"

"And I said unto him, 'Sir, you know.'"

"And he said to me, 'These are they which came out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'" (Revelation 7 vv 13,14)

This is the tribulation. It will end with the return of Jesus Christ, with His saints. At the point of final defeat at the hands of satanically inspired leaders and nations, Israel will be saved by the return of their Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. As Jerusalem is surrounded and stormed by the adversaries...

"Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations ...and His feet shall stand upon the mount of Olives..." (Zechariah 14 vv 3ff.)

"Behold He comes with the clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him." (Revelation 1 v 7)

The Pre-Tribulation Rapture

We hold firmly to the teaching that the saints will be raptured before the 7 year tribulation period begins. Remember, some hold different views: there are those who believe in a Mid-Tribulation rapture at the end of the first 3½ years; others accept the idea of a Post-Tribulation rapture believing that the saints will go through the tribulation. Then there are those who support the idea of a Partial Rapture, the notion that only those Christians who are ready will be raptured; the rest will have to endure the Tribulation and make good their salvation during that time.

How does the Bible support the teaching that the saints will be raptured before the Tribulation period?

1. The tribulation is the time when God will resume dealing with His earthly people Israel. It is not for the Church. It is the "time of Jacob's trouble." (**Jeremiah 30 v 7**) It is the people of Israel in particular who will be the objects of the satanic persecution and attacks. In **Revelation 12**, the woman clothed with the sun and with the moon under her feet and upon her head a crown of twelve stars is Israel, from whom came the Messiah, Jesus Christ. From verse 5 we can deduce that the man child was, in fact our Lord and Saviour. But a secure place is found for the faithful remnant represented by the woman, where she is fed for 1260 days (3½ years) (v6). The dragon will persecute the woman (Israel) (v.13) but the woman is helped to escape and is nourished for a time and times and half a time (3½ years) (v.14). Nevertheless, the dragon still continues to make war with the remnant of her seed – the faithful remnant. (v. 17). The whole time is a time when Israel is the focus, not the Church. Daniel's 70 weeks are determined upon "thy people", that is, the people of Israel. The final week of 7 years is to do with Israel.
2. In the context of the terrible times of the tribulation period, Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church and reassured them:
"For God has not appointed us to wrath but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ."
(I Thessalonians 5 v 9)

3. In the book of The Revelation, chapters 2 and 3 contain the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor. Yet, whilst these churches are representative of the whole Church, they also represent successive phases in the history of the Church. Of significance to us are the last two churches. Philadelphia (meaning “brotherly love”) represents true Christians of the end time. They are true believers, brothers in the Lord, because they are born again of His Spirit. Laodicea (meaning “the people’s right”) or, rather as it is expressed in **Revelation 3 v14**, the church of the Laodiceans, represents a people full of themselves but actually having nothing. Outwardly they have a form of godliness, but they deny its power (**II Timothy 3 v 5**). Jesus Christ is shown to be excluded, standing outside the door seeking admission. (**Revelation 3 v 20**). Note the promise given to the Philadelphian church, to those who are true believers in the end times: **“Because you have kept the word of my patience, I also will keep you from the hour of trial, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”** (**Revelation 3 v 10**) They are NOT for the tribulation period.
4. Further, the sequence of the initial chapters in The Revelation is not without significance. Chapters 2 and 3, containing the letters to the seven churches, bring before us the whole age of the Church. Seven is a number in Hebrew which represents completeness. From chapter 4 onwards we have depicted for us the terrible scenes of the Tribulation period leading on to the Day of Judgment. But at the start of chapter 4, before those scenes unfold, John has a vision and receives a command: **“After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show you things which must be after these things.”** (**Revelation 4 v 1**)

John was taken to view scenes on earth from the same vantage point as the Church. He heard the trumpet call and was immediately in the Spirit, in heaven. It is clear that the Church is raptured at the end of the church age and before the tribulation scenes depicted in The Revelation unfold.

5. Then there is the picture of Noah and the flood in the Old Testament. The wrath of God was coming upon the earth. Noah was told to build an ark to the saving of his house. SEVEN days before the flood waters came the Lord shut them in. (**Genesis 7 v 10**) Seven years before the Day of Wrath, the Lord’s people will be taken to be with Him.
6. In this context it is interesting to note the reference to Noah in **Matthew 24**. When reading this chapter it is important to realise that most of it is about the tribulation period and is NOT for Christians. Jesus was talking to His disciples as Jewish believers. They had asked Him for the sign of His coming and of the end of the age. The events which Jesus describes at the beginning clearly indicate present events of wars and rumours of wars, which must happen, but the end is not yet. (v 6) Then there will be international conflicts, famines, pestilences and earthquakes in various places, all of which are signs with which we are familiar (v 7), but **“all these are the beginnings of sorrows.”** (v8)

Then comes a change. I believe that between verses 8 and 9 the rapture has taken place, for the scenes that follow definitely bear the mark of the tribulation. They are years of persecution for the people of Israel and that was relevant to the disciples because they also were of Israel and, at that time, before the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, knew only the Gospel of the kingdom – that God is the sovereign Lord and, where He reigns there is deliverance from the works of the enemy. After the rapture there are persecutions of the saints, betrayal, false prophets and deceivers. Iniquity will abound and the love of many will grow cold.

When we compare that with the scenes depicted by Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians, it must be the tribulation. When the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit is “taken out of the way” (**II Thessalonians 2 v 7**), that is, when the Church which is a habitation of God through the Spirit has gone (**Ephesians 2 v 22**), then iniquity will break out and the wicked one will be revealed, **“whose coming is after the working of Satan.”** (**II Thessalonians 2 vv 8,9**)

The message to those who hold to and proclaim the gospel of the kingdom in those days will be, ***“He that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved.”*** It is this gospel which shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations before the end comes. (**Matthew 24 vv 13 and 14**). These verses are to do with the tribulation NOT with the current Church age. We have a gospel of grace NOT of the works of enduring and holding on to salvation. We will not make the Lord Jesus come more quickly by preaching the Gospel of Christ in all the world. The day of His return is set and known to the Father. We cannot make Him come one day sooner or later. The whole passage refers to that period of time after the Church has been taken to be with the Lord.

Then, in verse 15, Jesus gets to the central point of the 7 year period – the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel in his 70 week prophecy. (**Matthew 24 v 15**) ***“For then shall there be great tribulation...”*** (**Matthew 24 v 21**) After that events lead on to the second coming of Jesus and the final judgment.

Before we leave Matthew 24, however, there might be someone who has noticed some end time events which seem to support a post-tribulation rapture:

“But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left.” (**Matthew 24 vv 37 to 41**)

So many use this as teaching on the rapture. It is not. Look at what is being said. Those who were taken in the time of Noe were the ungodly who were outside of the ark, carrying on life as usual. They knew nothing until the flood came and took them all away. This is confirmed in **Luke 17 v 27** where it clarifies the issue by saying, ***“...and the flood came and destroyed them all.”*** Noah and his family **did** know and they were preserved; it was the ungodly who were taken away to judgment and destruction. Listen to the question the disciples asked and to the answer Jesus gave them about those who were taken away:

“Where, Lord?”

And He said unto them, “Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.” (**Luke 17 v 37**)

This is NOT the rapture of the saints; that already happened before the tribulation started. It is the taking away of the ungodly to judgment and destruction.

A Partial Rapture?

Before we conclude this study, we must look at the claims of some that there will be a partial rapture: those who are ready at the Lord’s coming will be taken, but those believers who are unprepared or maybe backslidden, will be left behind to endure the tribulation.

It goes against good gospel teaching. Of those whom God has redeemed through the precious blood of Jesus shed on Calvary, none will be lost. In John 10, Jesus declared that He had lost none. ***“I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand. My Father which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to pluck them out of My Father’s hand.”*** (**John 10 vv 28, 29**) Satan will never be able to boast that he won any of the redeemed back. God never loses. Jesus never fails.

Further, how far away from the Lord would you have to be to miss the rapture? Would it be gross sin in the life of a believer or a momentary wrong thought? Would any of us be ready in that case? No, I am afraid this doctrine seeks to instil fear into the hearts of believers and promotes an unhealthy reliance on human ability and works rather than on salvation by grace through faith.

When Moses dealt with Pharaoh he did not budge an inch. We know that among the “redeemed” who left Egypt there were murmurers and complainers, but Moses argued for the release of everyone. None was to be left behind. Pharaoh was reduced to bargaining for at least the cattle to be left behind but Moses reply was, **“Our cattle shall also go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind.”** (Exodus 10 v 26)

Conclusion

We may, therefore, be confident that when Jesus comes to call out His saints from the earth, the whole Church, those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb and born again of His Spirit, will be caught up to meet Him in the air. This will take place before the seven years of tribulation begin. There is no need to worry and no need to fear. We are **“looking for that blessed hope, and the appearing in glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”** (Titus 2 v 13).

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8 vv 38, 39)