

End Times 3: The Rapture

The Bible is very clear that before Jesus comes back, there will be a time of terrible tribulation, when God pours out wrath on unbelievers, and believers are persecuted in horrible ways by unbelievers.

Most agree on that much. Where there is a lot of controversy is over the rapture. Will the church be raptured and taken out of this world before the tribulation, so we don't have to go through it? Or will the church go through the tribulation, and then the rapture happens after it's over?

I believe the second view – that we will go through the tribulation and then the rapture will happen at the same time as the Second Coming.

Let me give you 5 reasons why I believe that, and the most important one is #5, because that one shows us why this issue is so important.

1. The Rapture is Connected to the Second Coming

The Second Coming and the rapture are described together in Scripture without any statement about an intervening time gap. If God wanted us to think of them as happening at different times, we would expect some clear indication to that effect in the passages that teach about the rapture. I find no such indications in Jn.14:3, 1 Co.15:51,52 or 1 Thes.4:13-18 where the rapture is taught. In fact, I find the opposite. 1 Co.15:52, 1 Thes.4:16 place the rapture at the last trumpet, which happens at the very end (Mt.24:31).

2. The nature of our “meeting” Him

In 1 Thes.4:17 we learn that at the rapture we **will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air**. The word translated “meet” (ἀπάντησις) is a technical term that refers to the ancient custom in which people from a town would go out to “meet” an approaching dignitary for the purpose of accompanying him back to the town they had just come from.¹ When Jesus returns, we will meet him in the sky and accompany him to earth as part of his glorious entourage.

3. Jesus placed the rapture after the Tribulation

When Jesus said he would gather the elect from the four winds, and two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left, two women working and one will be taken and the other left. - I believe the most natural way to interpret that is as a reference to the rapture. And the context is a discussion of the Second Coming.

¹ TDNT v.1 p.380, NIDNTT v.1 p.325. While the word does not have to always mean this, it is the normal use, and it is consistent with the only other times the term is used in Scripture (Mt.25:6, Acts 28:15).

4. The chronology we are given in the Epistles

Paul told the Thessalonians that deliverance from their opponents would come on the day **when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels** (2 Thes.1:7). That's a description of the Second Coming. And that's when we will be delivered; not 7 years prior.

He also says that **our being gathered to him** will not take place **until the man of lawlessness is revealed** (2 Thes.2:3).

And he also says that the Day of the Lord (the Second Coming) will not surprise us and overtake us like a thief - not because we will have already been raptured, but because we will be alert (1 Thes.5:4-6).

And that alertness part brings us to reason #5, which is the reason why I think this issue is very important.

5. The warnings to the churches

The letters to the churches in Rev.2,3 call the churches to perseverance in light of what is coming in the rest of the book. While the comments to each church vary, one constant in all seven letters is the fact that the promises regarding eternal life are extended only to those who "**overcome**" (2:7,11,17,26, 3:5,12,21). Later, in ch.12 and 15, the martyrs are described as those who "**overcame**" (12:11, 15:2). And then at the end of the book, the Lord restates the fact that it is the one **who overcomes** who will inherit the New Jerusalem (Rev.21:7). And in 22:16 we find out that all of the material in Revelation is written not to some other category of tribulation saints, but to the Church.

And we see the same thing in Jesus' sermons about end times. In each of Jesus' major discourses directed to believers (with the exception of the Sermon on the Mount), the Lord devotes a substantial percentage of the discourse to warnings regarding the Tribulation, and calls for perseverance to the end.² The purpose of these warnings about the Tribulation is to exhort believers to be prepared so they do not go astray (Jn.16:1).

When Jesus speaks so earnestly and so often and so passionately about a warning, we should be very cautious about any doctrine that would dismiss those warnings as non-applicable to us unless something in Jesus' words would indicate they are not for believers in general. But just the opposite is true. Jesus speaks regarding the coming Tribulation in Lk.17:22-18:8, a lesson that applies to the *disciples* (18:1) and is a teaching regarding the perseverance of believers through the difficult period preceding the Second Coming (17:30, 18:6-8).

² the commissioning of the twelve in Mt.10:17-36, the Olivet Discourse in Mt.24:1-25:46, The Upper Room Discourse in Jn.15-17

If you would like to see my response to the arguments in favor of the Pre-Trib view, refer to the article titled “Rapture” on TreasuringGod.com. And I’ll also put that in the blog.

So all that to say this – the teachings about the tribulation are given to warn us to be prepared, because if we are not prepared ahead of time, then when it happens, it will be too late. We need to be alert, and ready to persevere. Getting ready to endure tribulation in the future was a matter of such urgency in Jesus’ heart, it would be foolish for us to develop a doctrine that tells people that all those warnings can be disregarded.