

“Why I Believe In A Pre-Trib Rapture”

Since we just studied through 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 last Sunday, which is the premier passage on the rapture, I thought I'd take this Sunday to share a little more on this subject to bring further clarity on the pre-tribulation rapture view. This is what I believe the Bible teaches. And yet I know many others that read the same Bible and come to a different conclusion. Some pastors who I know love the Lord and who I respect will land differently on this. Some of you may have a different understanding of eschatology than I do. But since you give me the honour of teaching the Bible with you all, something I love and take very seriously, I thought it would be good to at least explain why I land on the view of a pre-tribulation rapture. And I hope you do your due diligence to know what you believe and why you believe what you believe. Don't just say I'm a pan-millennial where it will just all 'pan out'. It will, but let's not be afraid to dig in and see what we believe the Bible says about these last days.

Again, if you land somewhere different than I do, don't feel you need to leave the church. These aren't matters of salvation. I never want these things to divide us or for me to sound condescending to those who hold to a different position eschatologically (the study of end times).

We're going to look at the word RAPTURE and use that as a mnemonic outline, giving 7 Reasons why I believe in a pre-tribulation rapture.

R – Reason for the Tribulation

A – Absence of the Church in Revelation 6-18

P – Promise of Imminency

T – Typology

U – Unique Relationship of Christ and the Church

R – Restraint Removed

E – Exempt from the Tribulation

1. Reason for the Tribulation

What is the purpose for this Tribulation period?

1. To judge the world and bring retribution for sin (Psalm 2:1-6).
2. To refine Israel and prepare her to receive her Messiah (Deuteronomy 4:30-31; Zechariah 13:8-9).

Daniel 9 is a fascinating prophecy that declared there were 70 weeks set apart for Israel (a week is a Hebrew idiom for a group of 7). So, this prophecy is revealing 70 groups of 7 years – a 490 year span for Israel:

- **Daniel 9:24–26**, *“Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy.”*²⁵ *“Know therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times.”*²⁶ *“And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined.”*
- This equals 69 weeks, and if you want to break it down further, it’s 483 years or 173,880 days (using the Babylonian calendar which used 360 day years).
- We’re given some very precise dating. From the time that the decree goes forth to rebuild Jerusalem, until the Messiah comes, it would be 483 years.
- We know from Nehemiah 2:1-6 that a decree to rebuild Jerusalem and its walls was issued in the month of Nisan, in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes. This is believed to be specifically March 14, 445 B.C.

From this command until the Messiah would be 483 years or 173,880 days. A very interesting event took place if you add up these days from March 14, 445 B.C., it was the day that Jesus came riding into Jerusalem being proclaimed as the Messiah! That day was April 6, 32 A.D. exactly 173,880 days from the issuing of the decree.

God’s Word fulfilled exactly to the day!

But we’ve only dealt with 69 weeks, there’s one more week unfulfilled, one more group of 7 years that is specifically for Israel. This fits the 7 year tribulation period.

- **Daniel 9:27**, *“Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes*

desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate.”

- This speaks of the work of the antichrist during the Tribulation.

We're living in an interval between these two periods in Daniel; between the first 483 years decreed for Israel, and the last 7 years. God's prophetic clock centers around the nation of Israel. They've been temporarily laid aside at this time, and we're living in the church age. But there will come a time when the church will be raptured up – all believers in Christ will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and go to heaven. At that point God will begin to focus His work in and through His people Israel once more.

And yes, the tribulation is a time of the Lord's judgment and wrath upon a Christ rejecting world, but it will also provide the humbling and chastening of Israel to eventually turn to Jesus as their Messiah:

Daniel 12:4–7, *“But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.”*⁵ *Then I, Daniel, looked; and there stood two others, one on this riverbank and the other on that riverbank.*⁶ *And one said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, “How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?”*⁷ *Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.”*

- Sometimes we need to be knocked down to cause us to look up.
- This is what will happen for Israel in the Tribulation. It's not needed for us, as we've already put our faith in Jesus. We've already humbled ourselves, recognized our need for salvation and called out to Jesus.
- So, we will be taken up before this time that God begins to refine Israel.

2. Absence of the Church in Revelation 6-18

The book of Revelation gives us some wonderful details about things to come. However, a lot of people also think the book of Revelation is a difficult book, a scary book, a book to avoid. And I think that's such a shame. Because not only does the book of Revelation have a built-in blessing for us (Revelation 1:3), but it also has a built in outline for us (Revelation 1:19).

- **Revelation 1:3**, *"Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near."*
- **Revelation 1:19**, *"Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this."*

So John is told *write the things you have seen*. That's Jesus! We have the resurrected, glorified Jesus detailed in Chapter 1.

Then John is told to *write the things which are*. In Chapters 2-3 we have the churches – 7 specific churches existing at the time of John writing this.

Interestingly, these churches, in the order they're written, give us an overview of church history right up to today. It's quite remarkable.

Then John is told to *write the things which will take place after this*. After what? After the churches.

- The term church or churches is used 20 times in Revelation. All but one are used in the first 3 chapters.
- Where's the church? In heaven!

Revelation 4 begins with:

Revelation 4:1–2, *"After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, 'Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.'"² Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne."*

Come up here! Sounds like the rapture doesn't it? And immediately John is in heaven. I believe this is revealing what is going to happen after the church age. The church will be raptured up and God will begin to focus on Israel once again.

And check out the song John hears being sung in heaven.

Revelation 5:9–10, *"And they sang a new song, saying: 'You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,'"¹⁰ And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.'"*

- Only the church can sing this song. We are the redeemed!
- The church is seen next in Revelation coming back with Christ after the Tribulation (Revelation 19:14). And we're coming back to reign with Christ on the earth! We have so much to look forward to.

3. Promise of Imminency

Throughout Scripture we're given warnings to be watchful because the Lord could come at any moment. The doctrine of Imminency is that there is nothing that needs to be fulfilled or take place before Jesus comes.

He can come at any time, so be ready and watching:

- **Mark 13:32–37**, *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. ³⁴ It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. ³⁵ Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—³⁶ lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. ³⁷ And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"*

If we were to go through the tribulation, then we would have some indicators of what is to come. People would be more interested in watching for an antichrist, than the returning Christ. We would look to see when a peace treaty is signed with Israel, then we'd know we're living in the last 7 years. When you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel, and Jesus in Matthew 24:15-16, then you know you're in the second half of the 7 year tribulation. Time to really start counting down and getting things in order. But this doesn't lend itself to Imminency. There's no urgency.

The rapture of the Church before the tribulation provides an imminent return of Christ and a living with urgency and readiness.

- **1 Corinthians 1:7**, *"so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,"*
- **Philippians 3:20**, *"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,"*

4. Typology

The Bible is full of pictures or types that reveal a truth for us through a person or object that foreshadows a New Testament reality. The Passover and passover lamb was an incredible type of what Jesus was going to provide for us.

The brazen serpent lifted up in the wilderness for Israel's healing was a type of Christ's crucifixion.

And throughout the Old Testament we have great examples, pictures or types of God delivering His people out of judgment. In fact when Abraham interceded for Lot he said, *"Far be from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked..."* (Genesis 18:25).

Lot was told to flee to a place to be spared from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. **Genesis 19:22**, *"Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there..."*

Jesus brings up the case of both Noah and Lot when He talks about the end times.

- **Luke 17:26–29**, *"And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: ²⁷ They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. ²⁸ Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; ²⁹ but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all."*
- Many use this passage to speak of how God will deliver the righteous out of the way before His judgment comes. That is certainly true. But Jesus uses these examples to share how people will just be going on with their lives in those last days. There was a complacency to the warnings of God in that day as there will be in our day.

I think a better picture of the rapture from the Old Testament is Enoch:

- **Genesis 5:24**, *"And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him."*
- Enoch is a great picture of the church being raptured up before the judgment of the flood.

Other people in Scripture that were caught up:

Elijah (2 Kings 2:11); Paul (2 Corinthians 12:2-4); Philip (Acts 8:39); the 2 Witnesses (Revelation 11:12).

5. Unique Relationship Between Christ and the Church

The Church has been called the Bride of Christ. We have a special relationship with Jesus. And when you follow the customary marriage progression in Jesus' time, it fits so perfectly with what we see Scripture teaches about the rapture.

A Jewish wedding consisted of 3 parts:

(1) The **Engagement** was an agreement that was reached between the parents of the bride and groom. A price was set for the bride and the couple entered into this arrangement for marriage.

(2) The **Betrothal** was more official. This is when the couple exchanged vows in the presence of family and friends. This is when they were considered officially married. They had covenanted to be together and be one, and this could only be broken by divorce. This betrothal period could last for up to a year. In the meantime, the groom was adding a room onto his father's house for them to live in.

- The picture is wonderful as Jesus said in **John 14:1-3**, *"Let not your heart be troubled; you 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 to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."*

As the groom and his bride were apart, and as the groom prepared a place for them to dwell, the groom would come for his bride at an unexpected time. The bride would not know when, but would live watching, waiting, and expecting.

(3) The **Wedding and Wedding Feast** was the third event. When it was time for the wedding, the groom would leave his father's house and go to where his bride was to bring her back home with him.

As the groom would get close, the groomsman would blow the shofar, the trumpet would sound and the groom would take his bride home to his father's house where they would enter the bridal chambers to consummate the marriage.

- The guests would continue to celebrate at this wedding feast for the next 7 days. All the while the bride and groom were waited on and treated like royalty.
- After the 7 days the bride would be brought out before all the guests.
- These 7 days in the bridal chamber are a picture of the 7 year tribulation period where we'll be, not in tribulation on the earth, but in jubilation in heaven. After the tribulation we will return with Christ to the earth as the Bride of Christ.
- **Isaiah 26:20**, *"Come, my people, enter your chambers, And shut your doors behind you; Hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, Until the indignation is past."*

We're the bride of Christ, were not the object of His brutality. Any good husband would protect his bride from harm. This is what Jesus accomplishes with the rapture.

6. Restraint Removed

Paul says something very interesting in 2 Thessalonians 2.

2 Thessalonians 2:5–8, *"Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? ⁶ And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming."*

Paul is speaking of the revealing of the antichrist (lawless one). And this person won't be revealed until that which is restraining is removed. Notice the **He** is capitalized in vs. 7. I believe this is speaking of the Holy Spirit, and more so, the Holy Spirit in the church.

- So many people ask, *'How will people be saved in the Tribulation if the Holy Spirit is not here?'* But He will be. He's omnipresent.
- David wrote in **Psalms 139:7-8**, *"Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? ⁸ If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there."*
- So the Holy Spirit can't be absent, but His effect in the world can be diminished through the absence of the Church. The Holy Spirit indwells each believer and empowers us to live as light in the darkness. There is a restraining work happening through the Holy Spirit's power in and through the church.
- So when the church is raptured up, it will open the way for the enemy to push ahead and the antichrist will emerge and be revealed.

7. Exempt from the Tribulation

Revelation 3:10 gives us a great promise, *"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."*

Some believe that God will preserve us through the tribulation, but this says He will keep us **from** the hour of trial. The word 'from' is the Greek word *Ek*,

meaning *out of*. We as believers in Christ will literally be taken 'out of' the way before His judgment and wrath hits the earth.

1 Thessalonians 5:9, *"For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,"*

1 Thessalonians 1:10, *"and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."*

Romans 5:9, *"Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him."*

We will experience tribulation and trials, that's a result of a fallen world, but the time of the tribulation spoken of here is a time of judgment and wrath. We're not appointed to that. That's the grace and mercy of God toward His people.

Titus 2:11–13, *"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,"*