

The Mystery of the Rapture

Why isn't the Rapture mentioned in the book of Revelation?
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Does the Rapture mark the beginning of the Tribulation? No, the Bible does not state anywhere that the Tribulation begins with the Rapture. I believe the Rapture could occur months or even years before the Tribulation begins, although it is likely to occur near the beginning because the Tribulation is the time of the pouring out of God's wrath, and 1 Thessalonians 1:10 says that Jesus will "deliver" His Church "from the wrath to come."

Another reason for believing the Rapture is likely to occur near the beginning of the Tribulation is because 2 Thessalonians 2 says that the Antichrist cannot be revealed until a "restrainer" is "taken out of the way" (2 Thessalonians 2:6-7). I believe that restrainer is the Holy Spirit working through the Church. Thus, when the Church is removed, the Antichrist will be unleashed, and the Tribulation will begin.

The prophet Daniel indicates that the starting point of the Tribulation will be a "covenant" that the Antichrist will arrange for Israel that will evidently guarantee the nation's peace and enable the Jews to rebuild their Temple (Daniel 9:27).

Why the Rapture is not specifically mentioned in Revelation?

The book of Revelation implies a pre-Tribulation Rapture without specifically mentioning the event. In chapter 4 verse 1, John sees a door open in the heavens and he is raptured to Heaven in what appears to be a symbolic type of the Rapture of the Church. In Revelation 19:11, John sees the heavens opened again, and Jesus descends on a white horse, with the Church accompanying Him (Revelation 19:14). Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation focus on the Church, but there is no more mention of the Church until the end of the book (Revelation 22:16). From chapter 4 through chapter 21, there is only mention of "saints," which would be those who accept the Gospel during the Tribulation.

The Bible never specifically defines the timing of the Rapture by tying it to any other event like the re-establishment of Israel or the re-building of the Temple. Even its proximity to the Tribulation is inferred rather than definitely stated. That's because the Rapture is an imminent event that could occur at any moment.

There are strong scriptural inferences that the Rapture will occur before the Tribulation begins. A couple of those are found in Jesus' Olivet Discourse as recorded in Luke 21. Jesus stated that when the end time signs "begin to take place," we are to look up, for our redemption will be drawing near (Luke 21:28). Note that the redemption will come not at the end of the signs, but as they begin to take place. Jesus then added that believers should pray earnestly that they might "escape" the great tribulation that is coming upon "all those who dwell on the face of the earth" (Luke 21:36).

In this regard, Paul states in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 that believers are waiting for "His Son from heaven . . . that is, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come." And Jesus told John to write to the church at Philadelphia, representative of faithful Christians, that "because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth" (Revelation 3:10).

Isn't a mid-Tribulation Rapture inferred in Revelation?

Some people think so. They point first to 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 which says the Rapture will occur at the blowing of the "last trumpet." They then point to Revelation 11:15 where the seventh and last trumpet of the trumpet judgments is blown. Since this seventh trumpet appears to be blown in the middle of the Tribulation, after the Antichrist kills the two witnesses, the argument is that this must mark the time of the Rapture.

There are several problems with this argument. In the first place, there is nothing in the Bible that identifies the seventh trumpet of the trumpet judgments in Revelation as the "last trumpet" of 1 Corinthians 15. The assumption that the two are the same is just that - an assumption. It is a shaky assumption because the trumpets of Revelation are announcing judgments that are aimed at unbelievers. They don't have any relationship to believers.

Now, there is a trumpet that the "last trumpet" of 1 Corinthians 15:32 can be identified with. It is the "trumpet of God" which 1 Thessalonians 4:16 says will be blown when the Rapture occurs. With that in mind, consider the fact that the last trumpet of the trumpet judgments in Revelation 11:15 is not identified as the trumpet of God but as the trumpet of an angel.

The second problem with the mid-Tribulation Rapture concept is that the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11 really doesn't relate to the middle of the Tribulation at all. Its blowing triggers a flash-forward to the end of the Tribulation to the proclamation that "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15).

Another thing to consider is that 1 Corinthians 15 was written about 45 years before the book of Revelation. Thus, it seems logical that the reference to a "last trumpet" must refer to something in the Old Testament that the Corinthian church would have been familiar with. That would most likely have been the trumpet referred to by both Joel and Zephaniah - the trumpet that will be blown before the Day of the Lord's judgment (the Tribulation - see Joel 2:1 and Zephaniah 1:16).

Can an argument be made for placing the Rapture near the end of the Tribulation?

Some have tried to do this, arguing that the wrath of God is not poured out until the end of the Tribulation. This concept is called the "pre-wrath Rapture."

The cornerstone of this concept is that the terrifying events during the first half of the Tribulation are due to the wrath of Man and Satan, and not to God. Since the Church is only promised protection from the wrath of God, the Rapture will not occur until near the end of the Tribulation when God will pour out His wrath on the world.

This concept raises a serious theological problem because it questions the sovereignty of God. It assumes that Man and Satan can act apart from God's will, when the fact of the matter is that neither can do anything God is not willing to permit. The Bible often portrays God carrying out His will through evil persons or nations. One of the classic examples is when He allowed the evil nation of Babylon to discipline Israel by destroying Jerusalem and the Temple and by carrying the surviving Jews away into captivity. It was an action that prompted the prophet Habakkuk to ask why God would punish those who are evil with those who are more evil (Habakkuk 1:13).

Any carnage wrought by Man or Satan during the Tribulation will still constitute the wrath of God. They will simply be His instruments. The Bible says God sits in the heavens and laughs over the plots and deeds of evil men, not because He does not care, but because He has everything under control (Psalm 2:1-6). The point is that He has the wisdom and power to orchestrate all evil to the triumph of His will in history. That's why the psalmist wrote that "the wrath of man shall praise You [God]" (Psalm 76:10).

I think it is also important to note that when God pours out His wrath, He does not always do so directly. One of His most common ways is to simply back away from the nation or person and lower the hedge of protection around them. This is clearly spelled out in Romans 1:18-32. That passage says that when people

rebel against God to the point that they begin to worship the creation rather than the Creator, God "gives them over" to the evil in their hearts. In other words, He just steps back and lets evil multiply. The passage further states that if they still refuse to repent, He steps back again and "gives them over to degrading passions." And if they persist in their rebellion and sin, He finally "gives them over to a depraved mind" at which point the society destroys itself. Such destruction could be viewed as the wrath of Man, but it is really the wrath of God working through Man.

There is another serious problem with the pre-wrath Rapture concept. It relates to the fact that all the wrath of Revelation is specifically portrayed as the wrath of God. Where do the seal judgments originate? The answer is from the throne of God as Jesus opens each seal of the scroll that was in the Father's right hand (Revelation 6:1). And where do the trumpet judgments originate? The same place - from the throne of God (Revelation 8:2). When we arrive at the bowl judgments in Revelation 15:1, we are told that with them, "the wrath of God is finished."

Another problem with the pre-wrath concept is that it does violence to the chronological order of Revelation. The seal judgments are viewed as the wrath of Man and Satan, occurring during the first half of the Tribulation. The trumpet and bowl judgments are considered to be the wrath of God. They are lumped together at the end of the Tribulation. There is no justification for putting the trumpet judgments at the end of the Tribulation. They are clearly placed in the first half of the Tribulation in the chronological layout of the book of Revelation.

One final problem with the pre-wrath concept of the Rapture is that it disputes the fact that there is no purpose for the Church being in the Tribulation. The Tribulation is the 70th week of Daniel, a time devoted to God accomplishing His purposes among the Jewish people, not the Church.

Couldn't God just protect believers during the Tribulation? Is it really necessary to remove them from the earth?

Yes, the Lord could provide believers with supernatural protection. In fact, He will do precisely that when He provides saints who are present in the Tribulation with protection from the stings of the demonic locust attack that will be part of the trumpet judgments (Revelation 9:4).

But God's promise to the Church during the Tribulation is not one of protection, but one of deliverance. Jesus said that when the signs pointing to the Tribulation "begin to take place," believers are to look up because their "redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28). He also urged believers to pray that they might "escape all these things" (Luke 21:36).

There really is no purpose for the Church to be present during the Tribulation. It is a time of the pouring out of God's wrath upon those who have rejected His grace, love and mercy. There are some who argue that the Church must be "purged" during the Tribulation to purify it. But to me, this idea is absurd. The blood of Jesus is sufficient to cleanse us of all our sins. That is an accomplished fact for those who have put their faith in Jesus (Ephesians 5:26-27). Furthermore, the concept of purging the Church during the Tribulation converts the whole period into a Protestant version of purgatory. It also violates the wedding imagery that the Bible uses to describe the relationship between Christ and His Church. Jesus is not going to beat up His Bride for seven years and then marry her!

Some who believe that the Church will go through the Tribulation often point to the example of Noah and his family. They were left on the earth as God poured out His wrath, but they were protected by the Lord. But this example ignores the fact that Enoch was raptured out of the world before the flood began (Genesis 5:24). I believe Enoch is a symbolic type of the Church and Noah and his family are a type of the Jewish remnant that will be protected through the Tribulation until the day that the Messiah returns.

Aren't those of you who believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture a bunch of escapists who are not willing to suffer for the Lord?

There is nothing wrong with being an "escapist." Noah was an escapist and so was Lot. And Jesus said that when the end time signs begin to appear, we are to pray "to escape the things that are about to take place and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36).

Certainly we are called to suffer for Christ (Romans 8:17). And anyone who truly stands for Jesus in this world will be persecuted (John 15:19). We are assured that as believers we will suffer tribulation in this world (John 16:33), but we are promised that we will be exempted from the great tribulation that will one day come upon all the world (Revelation 3:10).