

Pre or Post Tribulation Rapture?

The Rapture of the church involves all believers being caught up to heaven—those just resurrected, together with those alive at the time ([1 Thes 4:13-18](#)).

If it occurs at the beginning of the tribulation period, then clearly Christ's Second Coming at the end of the Tribulation to rescue Israel in the midst of Armageddon is a separate event.

According to [Zechariah 14:3-5](#), "all the saints" must accompany Christ back to earth. But if the Rapture occurs at the end of the Tribulation, it must be simultaneous with the Second Coming, making them one event.

Which is it: two events separated by seven years, or one event with two diverse purposes? This question, though it has nothing to do with the gospel of salvation, divides much of the evangelical church. Happily, it can be settled rather easily. The descriptions in Scripture of the Rapture and Second Coming respectively are so different in so many details that they could not possibly be describing the same occurrence. We can't cover all of these distinctions, but here are a few:

1. At the Rapture, Christ does not return to earth but catches believers up to meet Him above the earth, taking them directly to heaven: "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" ([Jn 14:3](#)) "caught up...to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" ([1 Thes 4:17](#)).

In contrast, at the Second Coming Christ returns to this earth to rule Israel and the world from David's throne in Jerusalem: "his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem" ([Zec 14:4](#)); "the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" ([Lk 1:32, 33](#)); "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him....The armies which are in heaven followed him....Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and shall rule them with a rod of iron" ([Rv 19:11-15](#)).

2. At the Rapture there is a resurrection of all believers who have died up to that time: “the dead shall be raised incorruptible” (1 Cor 15:52, 53); “the dead in Christ shall rise first...” (1 Thes 4:16).

In contrast, at the Second Coming there is no resurrection until Antichrist is defeated, he and the false prophet have been “cast alive into a lake of fire” (Rv 19:20) and Satan has been bound in the “bottomless pit [for] a thousand years” (20:1-3) —none of which is even remotely related to the rapture of believers to heaven. Then, to “the first resurrection” which occurred at the Rapture are added a unique group: “them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands...they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (4, 5).

3. At the Rapture, the bodies of living believers (like those who are resurrected) will be changed to become immortal: “We shall not all sleep [i.e., die], but we shall all be changed...the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we [who are living] shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor 15:51-53); “we which are alive...shall be caught up together with them [the resurrected saints]...to meet the Lord in the air [clearly requiring immortal bodies]” (1 Thes 4:17).

In contrast, at the Second Coming all of the saints return with Christ from heaven and will therefore already have been changed into immortality: “the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee” (Zec 14:5); “I saw heaven opened [and one] clothed with a vesture dipped in blood...and the armies which were in heaven followed him [to] smite the nations” (Rv 19:11-15).

4. The Rapture occurs during relative peace and prosperity, when the world does not expect judgment from God: “And as it was in the days of Noah [the last thing they expected was God’s judgment]...they did eat, they drank...married wives...were given in marriage [and as in] the days of Lot...they bought, they sold...planted...builded....Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.” (Lk 17:26-30).

Again in complete contrast, the Second Coming occurs in the midst of the worst war the world has ever seen and following the greatest devastation this planet has ever suffered or ever will: “then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world...nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved” (Mt 24:21, 22); “behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed...power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger....There was a great earthquake...every mountain and island were moved out of their places...[men] hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks...for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (Rev 6:8-17); “and the four angels were loosed...to slay the third part of men” (9:15); “and the...sea...became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea. And...the rivers and fountains of waters...became blood...the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and...men were scorched with great heat...and...there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth....And every island fled away and the mountains were not found. And there fell upon men a great hail [of large stones]...every stone about the weight of a talent” (16:3-21); “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True....And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen....And I saw the beast [Antichrist], and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat upon the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and...the false prophet [and they] were cast alive into a lake of fire...” (19:11-21).

5. The Rapture occurs when conditions in the world seem to indicate that all is well, when very few expect Christ to return and He catches even the church by surprise: “of that day and hour knoweth no man...in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Mt 24:36, 44).

In contrast, when the Second Coming occurs, not even Antichrist is caught by surprise—the many visible signs alert everyone that Christ is right at the door: “when ye shall see all these things, know that it [Christ’s coming] is near, even at the doors” (Mt 24:33); “the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their

armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse" (Rv 19:19).

6. The Rapture occurs when the church is sleeping, with little expectation of the Lord's return: "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept" (Mt 25:5); "Watch ye therefore...lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping" (Mk 13:35, 36).

In contrast, the Second Coming occurs at the end of the Tribulation in the midst of worldwide devastation and hopeless distress; the Antichrist and his armies are attacking Israel, much of Jerusalem is already captured (Zec 14:1, 2), and Israel is on the verge of annihilation. It is inconceivable that the church, if it were still here, would be slumbering in complacency and under the delusion that "surely Christ wouldn't come now"! 7)

7. Since the Rapture instantly takes us, without dying, out of this world of sin, pain and sorrow to be forever with Christ and like Him, never more to grieve Him, **it is called the "blessed hope"**: "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Ti 2:13); "every man that hath this hope" (1 Jn 3:3).

In contrast, the Second Coming (or a post-trib rapture at that time) could hardly be called a "blessed hope," inasmuch as very few Christians (if the church were still here) would survive to enjoy it. Having refused to receive the 666 mark of the beast "in their right hand, or in their forehead" and therefore being unable to "buy or sell," and refusing to "worship the image of the beast [they would] be killed" (Rv 13:15-17). It makes no sense to suggest that if you can secretly eat out of enough garbage pails to avoid starvation and still keep one step ahead of Antichrist's world police death squads, "Blessed hope! You'll be raptured at Armageddon!"

8. As for the Rapture, unquestionably, the early church was taught to expect it at any moment and to eagerly watch, wait and look for Christ's return, when He will catch all believers up into His Father's house to be with Him eternally: "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that *wait* for

their lord..." (Lk 12:35, 36); "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we *look* for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Phil 3:20); "...ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to *wait* for his Son from heaven...even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (1 Thes 1:9, 10); "*looking* for that blessed hope" (Ti 2:13); "unto them that *look* for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb 9:28). One does not watch, wait and look each day for something that cannot happen until Antichrist's advent or the end of a seven-year tribulation. Thus, there must be a coming of Christ that could happen at any moment.

In contrast, the *Second Coming*, by very definition as described in Scripture, **cannot be expected momentarily**. Therefore, none of the scriptures just quoted concerning watching and waiting and looking for the Lord could refer to the *Second Coming* or to a post-trib rapture of the church. These scriptures could therefore refer only to a *pre-trib* rapture.

9. The pre-trib Rapture has a powerful, purifying effect upon those who have this hope in Him. The fact that it is to be expected at any moment can only mean that it must come before Antichrist is revealed and before the Tribulation. If Christ could come at any moment, there is no time to waste, no time to delay witnessing, no time to indulge in sin with the idea of repenting and changing one's ways later: "And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (1 Jn 2:28); "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (3:3).

In contrast, anticipation of the ***Second Coming*** (or a post-trib rapture at that time) could hardly have a purifying effect, because it can't take place for at least seven years—plenty of time to delay witnessing, getting right with the Lord and holy living until later. In fact, the Lord said that believing he couldn't come at any moment would have the *opposite* effect from purifying believers: "If that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants...and to eat and drink and to be drunken; the lord of that servant will come at an hour when he is not aware (Mt 24:48, 49; Lk 12:45, 46).

10. The Rapture is not only an event that we are to expect momentarily and to eagerly anticipate, but we are to ask our Lord to come immediately. Here is how the Bible ends: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come....Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rv 22:17, 20).

In contrast, the *Second Coming* is not of such a nature and timing that we could ask Christ to effect it right now. Since Christ obviously cannot return to the earth in judgment to rescue Israel, stop the destruction at Armageddon and destroy the Antichrist along with his kingdom and his armies until the end of the Tribulation, for us to cry out to Christ, "Come, Lord Jesus!" would be like demanding payment on a debt that isn't due for seven years. Yet, "the Spirit and the bride" *do* cry out, "Come, Lord Jesus."

We can only conclude that there must be a coming of Christ that could occur at any moment. It cannot be the *Second Coming* or a post-trib rapture. It can only be a pre-trib rapture.

There are at least *two events* which occur in heaven for which the church must be present and which, therefore, cannot take place until the **Rapture** occurs: the judgment seat of Christ, and the marriage of the Lamb to His bride: "for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom 14:10); "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10); "the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted [to] be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white [as a result of her cleansing at the judgment seat of Christ]" (Rv 19:7, 8). Both these events occur prior to Christ's return to earth and thus demand a prior rapture.

It is clear that the *Second Coming* cannot occur until these two vital events, which demand the presence of the church in heaven, have taken place. It is only after the Lamb has been married to His bride that she accompanies Him back to earth to rescue Israel and to destroy Antichrist and his armies: "And the armies which were in heaven followed him...clothed in fine linen, white and clean" (Rv 19:14). We know not why the Bridegroom tarries, but exactly as He foretold, the church is asleep. In that context, our Lord added: "And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (Mt 25:6). May

each of us be listening eagerly for that cry of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Indeed, we ought to be sounding it aloud, for the Lord could come *at any moment* to take us to Himself. So let us watch and wait and look for Him in eager anticipation—and encourage others to do the same. It will have a purifying and motivating effect in our lives.