

The RAPTURE OF THE SAINTS

“meeting the Lord in the air”

Key question

How do various Christian groups view the rapture of the church?

Key text

I Thessalonians 4:17

“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

Key Definition

The Rapture

At the second coming of Christ, the living saints will be taken up to meet him in the air. This is the blessed hope of the church.

Introduction

1. The English word comes from the Latin word, *rapio*, which means to seize or snatch in relation to an ecstasy of spirit or actual removal from one place to another.
2. This doctrine is an issue only for those who hold to a premillennial view of eschatology.

A. Key texts

1. **I Thess.4:13-18** “¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ for the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.”
2. I Cor.15:50-58.

3. Jn.14:1-3.

B. **Components of the Rapture (I Thess.4:13-18)**

1. The return of Christ. vs.16.
2. A resurrection of the dead. vs.16.
3. A rapture of the living saints. vs.17.
4. A reunion with the Lord and loved ones who have died. vs.17.
5. A reassurance to believers. vs.18.

C. **Views of the Rapture**

1. **Pretribulationism** - The rapture takes place before the seven year tribulation period.
2. **Midtribulationism** - The rapture takes place midway through the tribulation period.
3. **Posttribulationism** - The rapture takes place after the tribulation period. This is my view.
4. **Partial rapture** - Only faithful saints are raptured while nominal or carnal believers are left.

Views on the Rapture summarized

Partial Rapture	
Statement of View	This position states that only believers who are watching and waiting for the Lord will be raptured at various times before and during the seven-year Tribulation. Those who are raptured are spiritually mature saints, both dead and living (I Thess. 4:13-18).
Proponents	Joseph Seiss, G.H. Lang, Robert Govett, Witness Lee, G.H. Pember, Ira E. David, D.H. Panton
Arguments For	Arguments Against
New Testament often views the resurrection as a reward to be strived for (Matt. 19:28-29; Luke 9:62; 20:35; Phil. 3:10-14; Rev. 2; 11; 3:5). Therefore, not all believers will gain the first resurrection, only those who are worthy.	Rapture is part of the culmination of salvation. God starts salvation by grace and will finish it by his grace, not by our works. (Eph. 2:8-9)
Other Scriptures indicate partial rapture of believers, or an idea similar to this (Matt. 24:40-51)	There is confusion between verses that apply to Israel and verses that apply to the church in the Gospel passages. This is not the Rapture, but a taking away to judgment as in the example of the Flood in Matthew 24:39. I Corinthians 15:51-52 says all believers will be raptured.
There is an emphasis on watching, waiting, working, and the hope of rewards (Matt. 24:41-42; 25:1-13; I Thess. 5:6; Heb. 9:28).	The emphasis is on working for rewards (crowns, II Tim. 4:8) not for participation in the Rapture.
There are verses that emphasize the need to suffer in order to reign (Rom. 8:16-17; Luke 22:28-30; Acts 14:22; Col. 3:24; II Thess. 1:4-5). Therefore, believers must suffer now or during the Tribulation before they can reign with Christ.	Believers suffer in every age, and all believers will reign with Christ. The suffering and reigning of Christians is never linked to any supposed order of the rapture.
A believer, through sinning, can lose his right to enjoy the first resurrection and the kingdom (I Cor.	These passages speak of the unsaved not entering the kingdom. They do not apply to believers.

6:19-20; Gal. 5:19-21; Heb. 12:14).	
Worthy, watching believers will be rewarded by being raptured before the Tribulation (Rev. 3:10).	There is the division in the church, the body of Christ. It seems that those worthy of being translated will be raptured, while those not worthy will be left behind. Passages like John 14:1; I Cor. 15:51-52 obviously include all believers.
Since the baptism of the Spirit empowers to witness (Acts 1:8) and not all believers witness, not all believers are in the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:13) and not all are raptured.	The baptism of the spirit places all believers in the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:13).

Pretribulation	
Statement of View	Stated: Christ will come for his saints; afterward he will come with his saints. The first stage of Christ's coming is called the Rapture; the second is called the revelation. The older school emphasized the issue of "imminency." However, in recent days the crux of this position centers more around the aspect of God's wrath and whether the church is called to experience any or all of it during the Tribulation.
Proponents	John F. Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, John Feinberg, Paul Feinberg, Herman Hoyt, Charles Ryrie, Rene Pache, Henry C. Thiessen, Leon Wood, Hal Lindsey, Alva McClain, John A. Sproul, Richard Mayhue.
Arguments For	Arguments Against
The Bible says that Christians (the church) are exempt from divine wrath (I Thess. 1:10). This exemption does not mean that the church does not experience trials, persecution, or suffering.	Christians are exempt from God's wrath, but the majority of passages dealing with tribulation refer to the tribulation that believers suffer. Exemption from wrath does not mean exemption from tribulation. Also, if Christians are exempt from wrath of the Tribulation, those who believe during the Tribulation would need to be raptured at conversion.
The believers are also exempt from the time of wrath recorded in Revelation 3:10. This is supported by the way the Greek preposition <i>ek</i> (EK) is used in this passage.	Normative meaning of <i>ek</i> (EK) is "out from the midst of" and does not require a snatching from trial. It can mean kept from tribulation without being taken from trial. The normal preposition for "keeping away from" is not used here.
All positions of tribulation rapture predict a millennial kingdom. The pre-tribulation position calls for living, non glorified believers to enter the kingdom, thus to repopulate the kingdom (Zech. 12:10-13:1; Rom. 11:26).	144,000 of Revelation can populate the Earth during the time of the Millennium.
This position offers a clear distinction between the Rapture and the revelation, an interval of time. This is consistent with various Scriptures that discuss both these events. For the Rapture: John 14:1-14; I Cor. 15:51-58; I Thess. 4:13-18; for the revelation, or the second coming of Christ: Zech. 14; Matt. 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-27; Rev. 19.	The "blessed hope" and "glorious appearing" are the same events (Rapture and revelation). The New Testament speaks of one second coming, not of two comings or of a coming in two stages. The distinction may be in the nature of events not in time differences.
This position stresses imminency. Christ can return at any time; therefore believers have an attitude of expectancy (Titus 2:13). There are no preparatory warnings of an impending tribulation for the church-age believers (Acts 20:29-30; II Peter 2:1; I John 4:1-3).	Imminency for the apostles and the early church during this time revolved around the second coming of Christ. Thus, the two events are coterminous, not separate (Matt. 24:3, 27, 37, 39; II Thess. 2:8; James 5:7-8; I John 2:28). Also, II Thess. 2:1-10 may list events to be expected before the Rapture.
This position sees a literal Tribulation as given in Revelation 6-19. There is no mention of the church (argument from silence) in Revelation 4-18.	Much language in Revelation 6-19 is figurative, the tribulation may be as well. Argument from silence is inherently weak reasoning.
The Restrainer mentioned in II Thessalonians 2:1-12 is the Holy Spirit indwelling the church. He must remove her (the church) before the Tribulation begins.	Holy Spirit's indwelling ministry is not equivalent to his restraining work. Also, passage does not clearly equate the restrainer with the Holy Spirit, or the removal of the restraint with a rapture of the church.

Midtribulation	
Statement of View	This position sees that the church, believers in Christ, are raptured in the middle of the tribulation period, prior to the Great Tribulation. This view offers the best of the pretribulation and posttribulation positions. It also has the mid-seventieth-week Rapture.
Proponents	Gleason L. Archer, Norman Harrison, J. Oliver Buswell, Merrill C. Tenney, G. H. Lang
Arguments For	Arguments Against
This position offers fewer problems than either the pre- or posttribulation views. It avoids the problems of the two extremes.	There is a loss of imminency in this position (as also in posttribulation). No longer are we called upon to wait and watch, but to look for preparatory signs, as given in the book of Revelation and in Matthew 24:1-14.
There is a great emphasis on the 3 1/2 years (42 months, 1,260 days) in the Scripture to divide the 7 years of Tribulation (Dan. 7; 9:27; 12:7; Rev. 11:23; 12:3 6, 14).	The emphasis on the middle of the Tribulation is due to the breaking of the covenant with Israel (Dan. 9:27), not because of the Rapture.
The Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24-25) talks of the coming, appearing, and return of Christ. It coincides with the Rapture passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:15.	The only concrete link is the use of <i>parousia</i> in both passages. Many other differences in the contexts make this a weak link.
2 Thessalonians 2:14 clearly specifies preceding signs to the Rapture.	II Thessalonians 2:1ff. refers to the two events preceding the Day of the Lord, not the rapture of the church.
Revelation 11: 15-19 mentions the seventh trumpet, which is identical to the trumpet of God in 1 Thessalonians 4:16.	Does the Rapture truly occur in Revelation 11 just because there is a trumpet sound? The argument is weak and has no biblical basis.
This position keeps the distinction between the Rapture and revelation, thus two stages in the coming of Christ.	Pretribulation also maintains temporal distinction. Posttribulation maintains a distinction as well, though it is a difference in essence rather than time.
The church is delivered from the wrath of God but not from trials and testing, since the Rapture occurs in the middle of the Tribulation, just prior to the great outpouring of God's wrath.	Those who hold this view must devise a new concept of wrath in the book of Revelation,. There is forced spiritualization of chapters 1-11 for contemporary purposes and not future fulfillment. The church can be delivered from wrath either by pretribulation rapture or by protection from wrath.
Just as there is overlapping in the book of Acts in terms of the program of God for the church and Israel, so there is overlapping in the program of God in the book of Revelation.	The church has both Jews and Gentiles in it. This does not necessitate, however, an overlapping of God's program for the church and for national Israel.
This view allows for the nonglorified saints at the end of the Tribulation to enter the millennial kingdom to repopulate the world.	Pretribulation also allows for repopulation. Also, it is possible that some unbelievers will enter the Millennium since the conversion of Israel will not take place until the Second Advent.

Posttribulation (This is the view I prefer.)	
Statement of View	This position asserts that the living believers are to be raptured at the second coming of Christ, which will occur at the end of the Tribulation. Within this camp, there are four views as categorized by Walvoord: (a) classic, (b) semiclassical, (c) futurist, (d) dispensational. The spectrum is broad, encompassing a period of time from the early church fathers to the present century.
Proponents	Classic: J. Barton Payne; Semiclassic: Alecander Reese, Norman MacPherson, George L. Rose, George H Fromow; Futurist: George Ladd, Dave MaPherson; Dispensational: Robert Gundry, Douglas J. Moo; Others: Harold Ockenga, J. Sidlow Baxter

Arguments For	Arguments Against
The Rapture is preceded by unmistakable signs (Matt.24:3-31). These signs are part of the tribulation period the saints must go through. The culmination will be the return of Christ, which involves the rapture of believers (Matt.24:29-31, 40-41). In the Olivet Discourse Christ does talk of the Rapture with the revelation.	The position raises problems with the repopulation of the millennial kingdom by flesh and blood believers if they are all raptured and glorified.
The parable of the wheat and tares (Matt.13:24) shows that separation takes place at the end of the age. At that time, the good (believers) are distinguished from the bad (unbelievers), and this occurs at the end of the Tribulation.	The view that the 144,000 in Revelation are the ones who populate the earth fails to take the context of this passage into consideration.
The order of resurrection demands that all believers of all ages be brought back in their glorified bodies at the end of the Tribulation (Rev.20:4-6)	Their exegetical argument of Rev.3:10 with ἐκ ("from") is weak. To interpret "trial" as anything else but God's wrath is not doing justice to this word or the text.
The New Testament words on the return of Christ make no distinction of stages: epiphany, manifestation, revelation, parousia, the day, that day, the day of Jesus Christ, the day of the Lord Jesus, and the day of the Lord.	The sequence of events, connecting I Thess.4 with the Rapture and I Thess.5 with the Day of the Lord, is glossed over in determining chronological order or events.
The phrase "keep you from the hour of trial" in Rev.3:10 can also refer to deliverance from the wrath of Satan as it operates in the Tribulation period.	Just as Scripture may be somewhat silent regarding a pretribulation rapture, so there is great silence in a posttribulation rapture. This is especially true in John's prophetic letter of Revelation, where there is more emphasis on the return of Christ. A case in point is the vague mention of the church in Rev.4-18
The rise in apostasy is a sign that will precede the return of Christ (II Thess.2:8)	The argument that a posttribulation rapture was the belief of the historic Christian church falls apart when we see that what was believed in the early church is quite different from what is believed today. Nevertheless, the basis of a doctrinal truth is not the early church, but the Word of God.
Much of Scriptural teaching to the church concerning the end times is meaningless if the church does not go through the Tribulation (Matt.24:15-20)	This position conflicts with the teaching of the imminent return of Christ. Scripture teaches us to wait and watch, not for preparatory signs of Christ's coming but for the blessed hope of his return (Titus 2:13).

Questions that you should be able to answer.

1. Specific facts you should know.

- a. What is the rapture?
- b. Which texts speak of a rapture of believers to be with Christ?

2. Issues that you should be able to discuss.

- a. What are the strongest arguments for each of the rapture positions?
- b. Why should different views on this issue not separate Christians from each other?