

When Will The Rapture Occur?

The rapture is known as the removal of the church from the earth. That is, the rapture is the removal of those who have truly believed in Jesus Christ. Non-Christians will be left behind on planet earth. The purpose of this study is to explain when in the future the rapture will occur. Four major views about the timing of the rapture will be considered. They are referred to as the pretribulation rapture, midtribulation rapture, pre-wrath tribulation rapture, and the post-tribulation rapture.

Overview of the Tribulation. Before we discuss the four views of the rapture, let's take a brief tour of God's plan for the future. The first reference to the tribulation is symbolically described

as ten toes in Daniel 2:42-43, and again by ten horns in Daniel 7:7-8. These passages are explained in the studies "Nebuchadnezzar's Dream — Meaning of the Fourth Kingdom," and "The Final Kingdom." Both passages

explain that during the tribulation, a one world government will rule the world. This worldwide government will be led by a brutal and demonically empowered leader, who will be the antichrist.

Then Daniel 9:27 gives us the prophetic timeline of the next major event in God's plan for the future. The passage refers to a week, which is a seven year period. This week refers to the duration of the antichrist's worldwide government. It is

also known as Daniel's seventieth week. It starts when a peace treaty with Israel is declared. That means the first 3.5 years of the tribulation is a time of peace and safety. In the middle of the tribulation, the treaty is broken by the antichrist. In Matthew 24:15, Jesus refers to the middle of the tribulation and tells us that is when the abomination of desolation is set up in the temple. That agrees with Daniel 9:27. Then Jesus proceeds to describe the last 3.5 years as great tribulation in Matthew 24:21. Then in verses 29-31, He describes the second coming of Christ. Jesus helps us understand the meaning of Daniel 9:27.

The tribulation is also described in Joel 3:1-16. Most

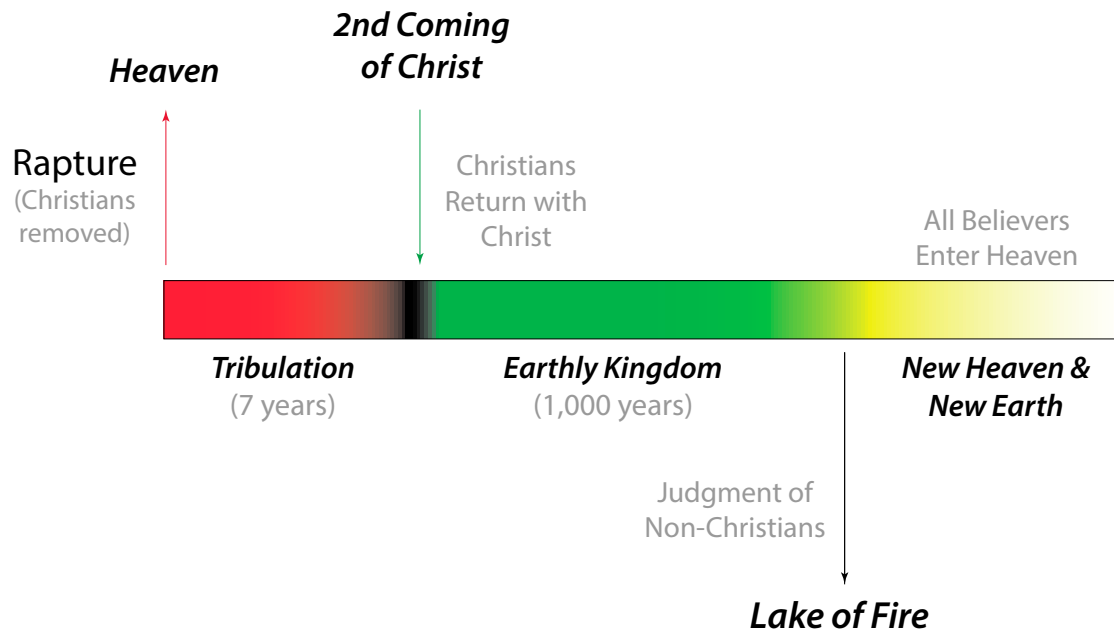
of that passage describes the battle of Armageddon, which occurs at the end of the tribulation. Daniel 11:40-45 describes the military maneuvers that will occur leading up to the battle of Armageddon. For more information visit, "The

Antichrist – The Past & The Future." The tribulation is also described in Zechariah 12:1-14:7, and it includes the second coming of Christ. Finally, the most significant description of the tribulation and the second coming of Christ is given in Revelation 6-19.

Overview of the Rapture. In the study, "The Rapture of the Church" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:3) we discovered the rapture is the removal of *only* true believers from



Timeline of The Future



the earth. 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 reveals that the rapture occurs in the twinkling of an eye. That refers to an extremely small fraction of a second. The believers will instantly disappear from the presence of those around them. If the rapture occurred during a church service, some people will disappear and others will be left. Or, imagine people suddenly disappearing from a restaurant, an airplane, or from a car on a freeway. Two people could be talking and instantly one of them disappears. Every unbeliever or non-Christian will be left behind. That describes what will happen when the rapture occurs. But when will the rapture occur? That is the question that is answered in this study. What follows are four different views.

Pretribulation Rapture View. The first view of the rapture is called the pretribulation rapture. This view has the most biblical support.¹ The view states the rapture will occur before the tribulation begins. There are a number of reasons why this is the correct view.

1) *The Rapture Occurs Before the Day of the Lord.* First, it is important to notice that the description of the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) occurs just before the events described in 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3. Here is 1 Thessalonians 4:18-5:3,

Therefore comfort one another with these words. Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. 1 Thessalonians 4:18-5:3 (NASB)

Notice that 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3 says the day of the Lord will come like a "thief in the night." 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 explains that the day of the Lord begins with the start of the tribulation. That means the day of the Lord begins with

1. MacArthur and Mayhue. Biblical Doctrine. Crossway, 2017, p. 899.

peace and safety, since the first half of the tribulation is a time of peace and safety (Daniel 9:27). Revelation 6:1-2 also references this time of peace of safety at the beginning of the tribulation. Also, Jesus alludes to the transition from a time of relative peace and safety to the time of great tribulation in Matthew 24:15. 1 Thessalonians 4:18-5:3 gives us the timeline of the rapture and the tribulation. The rapture occurs before the tribulation. The day of the Lord will continue until the universe is destroyed (2 Peter 3:10-13). The day of the Lord is more than judgment; it includes His destruction of this evil universe. That is why it is called the day of the Lord. It is His day.

We must also notice that 1 Thessalonians 5:4 tells us that the day of the Lord comes like a “thief.” The verse refers to the day of the Lord as “the day.” It says,

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief. 1 Thessalonians 5:4 (NASB)

When the Holy Spirit says the brethren are not in darkness, He is telling us that believers will not be surprised when the day of the Lord suddenly occurs, but unbelievers will be surprised. The expression “thief in the night” is used three other times in Scripture. It is used to teach us that both the second coming of Christ (Revelation 16:15) and the destruction of the universe (2 Peter 3:10) will occur like a “thief in the night.” 2 Peter 3:10 reveals the “thief in the night” is not exclusively used for the day of the Lord or the second coming of Christ. But 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3 helps us understand that the rapture occurs before the tribulation.

2) *Believers are Protected from the Tribulation.* Second, two very important verses help believers understand that we will escape the tribulation. The first passage is 1 Thessalonians 1:10. It says,

And to await for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 (NASB)

Here Paul told the Thessalonians that they were waiting for

the coming of Christ from heaven to rescue believers from the wrath to come. Throughout the Old Testament, the day of the Lord is always a time when God pours out His wrath. Therefore, “the wrath to come” refers to the coming tribulation period. 1 Thessalonians 1:10 reveals believers will not be living in the future tribulation.

Revelation 3:10 is an even stronger verse that reveals believers will not be living in the tribulation. The verse says,

... 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 on the earth. Revelation 3:10b (NASB)

The “hour of testing” is the tribulation since it is described as covering the entire world. The only testing that will occur worldwide is the prophesied tribulation. Jesus promises believers that He will “keep you from” the tribulation. The Greek phrase for “keep you from” is *tereo sy ek*. It literally means “to keep you out.” That is, believers will be kept out of the tribulation. This is a promise of Christ to believers.

3) *The Church is Not Mentioned During the Tribulation.* A third reason we should believe in a pretribulation rapture is that the church, *ekklesia*, is not mentioned during the time of the tribulation described in Revelation 6-19. It is important to notice that the church is mentioned in Revelation 1:4, 11 and then seven times in Revelation 2-3. It is not mentioned in chapters 6-19. Then once again it is mentioned in Revelation 22:16. The last verses are about the eternal heaven. This helps understand the church will not be in the tribulation.

However, this does not mean people will not become believers during the tribulation. Revelation teaches that people will be saved during the tribulation, but they are not members of the church. They will be like the Old Testament believers who did not have the Holy Spirit indwelling them (2 Thessalonians 2:7). For more information, visit “Will there be a second chance to become a Christian after the rapture?”

So, a pretribulation rapture is the correct view since 1) the rapture occurs before the day of the Lord, 2) believers are protected from the tribulation, and 3) the presence of the church is not mentioned during the tribulation.

Trumpets of the Last Days



Mid-tribulation Rapture View. The second view is the mid-tribulation rapture view. This view says the rapture will occur in the middle of the tribulation. This view usually claims that the two witnesses in Revelation 11 symbolize raptured believers. For example in Revelation 11:3 we read,

And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. Revelation 11:3 (NASB)

These two witnesses are usually understood to be Elijah and Moses (Revelation 11:6), but midtribulationists interpret them to be all believers in the church age. Verses 7-10 reveals that Satan will kill them and verses 11-13 says they will come back to life, ascend up to heaven and then catastrophic events will occur. Here are verses 11-13.

But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them. And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. Revelation 11:11-13 (NASB)

The midtribulation view claims the ascension of the two witnesses up into heaven symbolizes the church being raptured. The question one should ask is why do the two witnesses symbolize the single body of Christ?

This conclusion is important to those who use this passage to support their view since the seventh trumpet occurs

in Revelation 11:15. This is important to this view since 1 Corinthians 15:52 refers to the last trumpet during the tribulation, and 1 Thessalonians 4:16 also refers to a trumpet at the tribulation. Thus midtribulationists believe this supports their view. But there are at least two serious problems with the midtribulation rapture view.

1) *Incorrect View of God's Wrath in the Tribulation.* The first and most serious error is that they do not believe the first part of the tribulation is about divine wrath upon the earth. They have missed the fact Zechariah 11 describes the good shepherd (Jesus Christ) in verses 4-14, and then the false or worthless shepherd (the antichrist) in verses 15-17. The prophecy says that Israel will be given the false or worthless shepherd because they rejected Christ, the good shepherd. The antichrist is worthless because he does not care for Israel. The antichrist will be given to Israel as an act of judgment.

Then Zechariah 12 immediately describes the tribulation. That is, God's wrath is being poured out at the very beginning when the antichrist makes a peace treaty for Israel and seizes control. The "peace and safety" at the first half of the tribulation is a devious and false peace. The midtribulation view incorrectly assumes the wrath begins to be poured out in the middle of the tribulation. But the abomination of desolation in the middle of the tribulation (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15) will not be possible if the antichrist is not in control already. So, God's wrath is already being poured out.

Also, in 1 Thessalonians 5:9, the wrath of God is connected to the day of the Lord in verses 2-3. The day of the Lord is the outpouring of God's wrath on the earth.

2) *Assumes a Symbolic View of Revelation 11.* Second, the midtribulationist understands Revelation 11:3-13 symbolically and not literally. When a person interprets Scripture figuratively the meaning of the passage or verse is left up to the creativity of the interpreter. As a result, they ignore the literal meaning of the two witnesses and claim they symbolize the church. John Walvoord states,

By this, apparently, he means that the two witnesses are the living church and the resurrected saints at the time of the rapture.²

The midtribulationist says the two witnesses ascending up through the cloud in verse 12 symbolizes the rapture. Thus, they claim they have proved their point that the rapture occurs in the middle of the tribulation. But in order to reach this conclusion, they use a non-literal approach. In addition, the passage says the two witnesses will be killed during the tribulation. Therefore, are we supposed to believe all the believers will be martyred in the tribulation, and then resurrected? How can the saints die and then be raptured in the tribulation?

3) *Wrong Understanding of the Last Trumpet.* Third, it has already been pointed out that the midtribulationist believes the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15 is the last trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52 and the trumpet in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. But there is a serious problem at this point. They have a wrong understanding of the meaning of the last trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52. Revelation 11:15 is not the last trumpet. There is another trumpet at the second coming of Christ (Matthew 24:30-31). More information will be given in the pre-wrath tribulation rapture view.

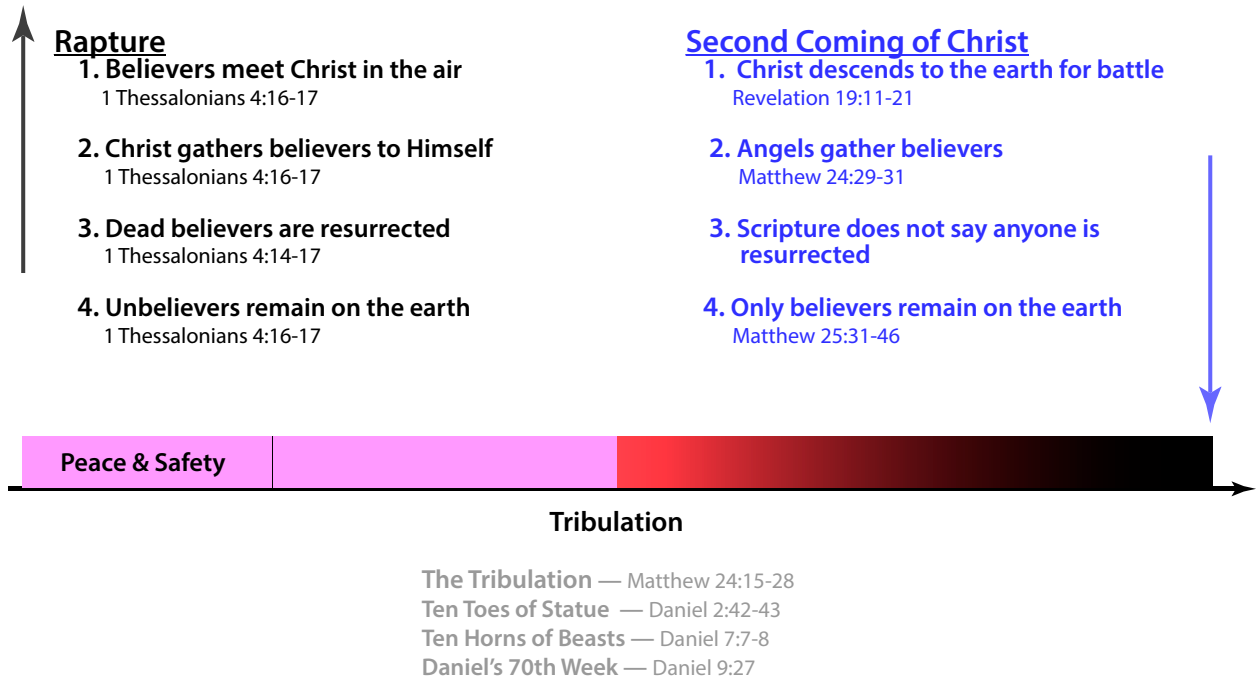
So, the midtribulation rapture view is rejected because it has an 1) incorrect view of God's wrath in the tribulation, 2) assumes a symbolic view of Revelation 11, and 3) has a wrong understanding of the last trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52.

Pre-Wrath Tribulation Rapture View. The third view of the timing of the rapture is called the pre-wrath tribulation rapture view. It claims the rapture will occur between the middle and the end of the tribulation when God's wrath is poured out on the earth at the seventh trumpet (Revelation 11:15). Essentially, this is a three-quarters rapture view because it says the church will be raptured at the seventh trumpet. There are two serious issues with this view.

1) *Wrong Understanding of the Last Trumpet.* First, one serious problem with this view is that it claims the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15 is the same trumpet in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and the last trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52. But that misses the fact that Matthew 24:30-31 states another trumpet will sound at the second coming of Christ, which will occur at the end of the tribulation, not the middle of the tribulation. That is, the seventh trumpet that occurs after the

2. John Walvoord. "Premillennialism and the Tribulation — Part VIII: Midtribulationism." Bible.org.

Rapture Is Not The Second Coming



middle of the tribulation is not the last trumpet. Here is Matthew 24:30-31.

And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. Matthew 24:30-31 (NASB)

So, this presents a serious problem. The seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15 is not the last trumpet. The last trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52 is the last trumpet in the church age. The last trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52 is not the trumpet at the second coming.

2) *Incorrect View of the Timing of God's Wrath.* A

second problem with this view is that it claims the wrath of God being poured out at the middle of the tribulation. They claim the wrath of God begins to be poured out at the middle because the word "wrath" occurs in Revelation 11:18, three verses after the seventh trumpet sounds. But they miss the point that God's wrath begins to be poured out at the beginning of the tribulation, as explained in the midtribulation rapture view.

In addition, the wrath of God begins to be poured out at the beginning of the tribulation as an act of judgment when the antichrist creates the peace treaty (Daniel 9:27). At that moment, the antichrist is given control of Israel. Then God's wrath is actually being poured out because the antichrist is an act of judgment on Israel (see the discussion about the antichrist in Zechariah 11 in the midtribulation rapture view).

So, the pre-wrath tribulation rapture view is rejected because it 1) has a wrong understanding of the last trumpet

in 1 Corinthians 15:52, and 2) has an incorrect view of the timing of God's wrath.

Posttribulational Rapture View. The final and fourth view is called the posttribulational rapture view. It states the rapture will occur at the end of the tribulation. This view says the church will go through the entire tribulation period. Then at the end of the tribulation, every believer is raptured and immediately returns to earth. Some have said the church goes up and then back down. There are number of serious problems with this view.

1) *Then There is No Need for a Rapture.* The first problem with this view is that there is no need for a rapture, if the church will immediately return to the earth. It is actually a fundamental problem with this view. What is the benefit?

2) *No Mortals will be in the Kingdom.* The second and most serious problem of this view, is that if this view is correct, then no mortal people will be living in the millennial kingdom. There will be no mortals in the kingdom since the rapture would remove all believers from the earth, and they would have immortal bodies. The Sheep and Goat Judgment would remove all unbelievers from the earth, and only angels and immortal believers would populate the millennial kingdom.

Let's expand upon this briefly. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus tells us about the Sheep and Goat Judgment. This judgment occurs after the second coming. The passage teaches that Jesus will determine who are Christians and who are non-Christians. Then He will only allow Christians to enter the millennial kingdom. The non-Christians will be sent to hell and wait for the final judgment. So, the point is that after the battle of Armageddon, the Sheep and Goat Judgment will occur and separate the believers from the non-believers. Only believers will remain on the earth and enter the millennial kingdom. Thus the millennial kingdom will be populated with mortal believers at the beginning. They will have children and some will believe in Christ and some will remain unbelievers. For more information visit, "The Judgment of the Nations — Sheep and Goat judgment."

If there are no mortals in the kingdom, then a serious problem exists. It will be impossible for immortal believers to produce children and fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 65:17-2.

The prophecy refers to children being born and those who are one hundred years old being considered youth.

3) *No Rebellion can Occur After the Kingdom.* If we assume this view is correct, then the rebellion at the end of the kingdom (Revelation 20:7-10) cannot occur since only angels and immortal Christians would be living in the kingdom. For a rebellion requires at least some unbelievers to be living in the millennial kingdom. Godly, immortal believers will not rebel at the end of the kingdom. This means the rapture cannot occur at the end of the tribulation.

4) *Wrong Understanding of the Last Trumpet.* A fourth problem with this view is that the last trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52 is not the trumpet at Christ's second coming. See the discussion of the trumpets in the discussion about the pre-wrath tribulation rapture view.

5) *Not Enough Time for John 14:1-3 to be Fulfilled.* Fifth, John 14:1-3 reveals that the posttribulational rapture view is wrong because the view does not allow enough time for believers to live with Christ in the Father's house in heaven between the rapture and the second coming of Christ. John 14:1-3 describes the rapture and it says,

Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 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. John 14:1-3 (NASB)

6) *Events of Rapture and Second Coming are Different.* Sixth, the events of the rapture as described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 do not agree with those in the second coming of Christ. For example, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 says that believers will meet Christ in the air, but Revelation 19:11-21 says Christ descends to earth to defeat the enemy in the battle of Armageddon. Next, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 says Christ gathers believers to Himself, but Matthew 24:39-31 says that at the second coming of Christ the angels gather believers to Himself. Third, 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 says dead believers are resurrected, but at the second coming of Christ no Scrip-

ture says that anyone is resurrected. Fourth, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 says that unbelievers remain on the earth, but Matthew 25:31-46 says that only mortal believers are left on the earth. Last, believers receive glorified bodies at the rapture (1 Corinthians 15:51-57), but at the second coming of Christ no one receives immortal bodies.

7) *No Time is Allowed for the Bema Seat Judgment.* 1 Corinthians 4:5 indicates the Bema Seat judgment (Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10) will occur after the rapture. It says,

Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. 1 Corinthians 4:5 (NASB)

The posttribulational rapture does not allow for the Bema Seat judgment to occur between the rapture and the second coming of Christ.

So, the posttribulational rapture view is rejected because 1) there is no need for a rapture then, 2) no mortals will be in the kingdom, 3) no rebellion can occur after the kingdom, 4) it has the wrong understanding of the last trumpet, 5) there is not enough time for John 14:1-3 to be fulfilled, 6) the events of rapture and second coming are different, and 7) no time is allowed for the Bema Seat judgment.

Conclusion. Therefore, only the pretribulational rapture view best satisfies. Believers will be rescued from the horrors of the tribulation. Praise the Lord!