

The Pre-Tribulation Rapture

Wednesday 3rd July 2024

A Zoom meeting at 4pm

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**Introduction:** The purpose of my talk this afternoon is to present to you some compelling reasons for believing in the Pre-Tribulation Rapture.

Neither Geoff nor I can make you believe what we believe regarding the timing of the Rapture, but we pray that we have been faithful to Scripture as we have presented our respective positions.

I could begin by rehearsing the more usual arguments and scriptures that support a pre-trib rapture, but I won’t. They are well known although I will mention them towards the end of this presentation.

I would like to begin by dispelling some popular misconceptions about the pre-tribulation Rapture. The first concerns the view that it was a doctrine popularised by John Nelson Derby and the Plymouth Brethren in the 1830’s. Most Google searches will say things like he invented this doctrine. Wikipedia’s entry says that *it is a theory that Christ will suddenly remove His Bride, the Church from the world, to its heavenly destiny before the judgements of the Tribulation.*

Whilst John Nelson Derby caused a revival of the pre-tribulation Rapture doctrine he neither invented it or was the first to believe in it. This honour fell to the saints of Israel and then of the Early Church.

In my lifetime, and particularly as a Christian over nearly 50 years, the extent of scholarly studies on pre-gospel writings such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Didache and the Essenes, has shed light onto so much theology and Biblical history. (more so than the library in theological college). An example in point would be Ken Johnson’s book on the Essenes called “The Damascus Covenant” and the Early Church Father’s writings and teaching on the Pre-Tribulation Rapture. Another Bible scholar and End Times teacher Lee Brainard (Biblefacts Ministries, [www.Biblefacts.org](http://www.Biblefacts.org) )whose research into the doctrine of the Pre-Trib Rapture has produced a fresh body of textual evidence relating to this doctrine. I would also mention Josh Peck, an expert on ancient manuscripts, DSC’s and prophecies who has recently joined Prophecy Watchers, for his contribution.

**The Rapture of the Church**

The next big worldwide event and the next event in God’s prophetic timetable is what is known as the Rapture of the Church. The word ‘rapture’ can be biblically defined as the coming of Jesus for His Church. Although the word ‘rapture’ is not found in the Bible, The Greek word used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is ‘harpazo’ that means to ‘snatched’. This was translated in the Latin by the verb ‘raptus’ which means ‘to catch up’. It is from the Latin verb that we have our English verb ‘rapture’. Just as the word Trinity isn’t in the Bible , the doctrine clearly is. Equally there is no mention of the ‘Bible’ in Scripture but the two Testaments comprise ‘Ta Biblia’ – ‘The Bible’ and that too is universally accepted. The doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture is equally accepted by a majority of believers.

Paul, the Apostle, also provides some more detail about the ‘Rapture’ in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 and Romans 8:11,19,21 &23. In 1 Corinthians he describes the Rapture as ‘the changing’ when he describes how the living believers in Jesus will be changed from their current mortal bodies to glorified, immortal bodies. Many refer to this as the doctrine of resurrection. Paul describes the Rapture as the ‘manifestation of the sons of God’ (that begins after the redemption of our mortal bodies). I Corinthians 15:42-44 describes the ‘changing’ as being from ‘corruption’ (perishable)to ‘incorruption’ (imperishable) in both Corinthians and Romans which is in line with Daniel 12:1-2, particularly verse 2 “ *And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.* NKJV

Scripture contains many other names for the Rapture, examples of which include “entering the bridal chamber” (Isaiah 2619-21); “The Gathering” (2 Thessalonians 2:1); “The Transformation” (Phillipians 3:20-21) amongst others.

One the three Rapture views (as opposed to ‘mid’ and ‘post’) is that of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture and for myself I am convinced that this is what the evidence of Scripture points to. Furthermore I believe that the Rapture could occur at any moment. As far as I can see there are no more prophetic scriptures that must be fulfilled before the Rapture can take place, but we will be hated for being followers of Jesus and the apostacy will take place. But there are many that must be fulfilled before the Second Coming of Jesus, either just after the Rapture or during the Tribulation.

Before we go on, let me summarise reasons for believing that the Church will be

raptured before the Tribulation begins:

(i) In the Bible we see that God never judges the righteous with the wicked

(Nahum 1 vv. 2-3).

(ii) Writing to Christians in Thessalonica Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5 v. 9 *‘God did not appoint us to suffer wrath....’* (i.e. Judgement).

(iii) The Church is not mentioned again in the Bible after Revelation 3 v. 22.

Because the Church is in heaven as Revelation chapters 4 and 5 indicate and this is before the Tribulation starts in Revelation chapter 6. The twenty-four elders are representative of the twelve tribes of Israel thus the Old Testament saints and the twelve apostles representing the New Testament saints being the Church.

(iv) In 2 Thessalonians 2 v. 1 - 8 it indicates that the antichrist cannot emerge and come to power until after the Holy Spirit and the Church have been removed.

(v) Bearing in mind that all the events in the Book of Revelation are in chronological order, we see that in Revelation 19 the wedding of the Lamb occurs before Christ’s Second Coming and the Battle of Armageddon.

(vi) When a country is set to go to war against another country, the first thing it does before battle commences is to withdraw its ambassador and people. Christians are Christ’s ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5 v. 20) and the Tribulation is a time of God’s judgemental warfare against the unrepentant wicked in the world, so it stands to reason that God’s people will be withdrawn from the earth before His judgements begin.

(vii) In Revelation 3 v. 10 Jesus states to the Christians in Sardis and all Christians that, *‘I will keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.’* The word ‘from’ is literally translated ‘out of’ while the word ‘trial’ affecting the whole world is a reference to the Tribulation. This is the blessed hope Paul talks about in Titus 2 v. 13.

When Jesus talks to His disciples in John 14 vv. 2 - 3 I believe He is referring to the Rapture of the Church when He says, *‘In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me....’*

**Pre-Tribulation Rapture Theology**

2 Thessalonians 2: 1-12 is the key Scripture regarding the timing of the Rapture. Not only does it confirm the timing of the Rapture (V7) but it explains that this is preceded by the ‘falling away’ or apostacy of many. Then the antichrist (Man of Lawlessness) is revealed, who desecrates the Temple before the Lord will overthrow him at His Second coming. 1 Thessalonians 4 vv. 13 - 18 is the main passage of Scripture regarding the Rapture of the Church. One of the strongest arguments in favour of a pre-tribulation rapture is found in 1 Thessalonians 5 v. 11 because it would be hard for Christians to encourage one another if they were due to go through the Tribulation. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is not referring to the Second Coming of Jesus as it clearly says that we are going to meet the Lord in the air.

In Zechariah chapter 14 v. 4 it says that Jesus is going to stand on the Mount of Olives at His Second Coming and then the battle of Armageddon will immediately take place (Revelation 19 vv. 19 - 21).

**Eusebius** (The Bishop of Caesarea. He lived between 260-340BC.)

It is interesting to note that the first two centuries of the Church were largely pre-millennial and pre-Tribulational. The Church was Amillennial and tended to spiritualise or interpret prophecy figuratively due to Replacement Theology which was largely believed at the time. By the time of Eusebius writing his commentary the Church was into complete amillennialism

Eusebius commentary on Luke 17:26

*“All are perished then except those gathered with Noah in the Ark, so also at His coming the ungodly in the season of apostacy, shall perish while according to the pattern of Noah, all the righteous and godly are to be separated from the ungodly and gathered into the heavenly Ark. For in this way comes a time when not even one righteous man will be found anymore amongst mankind. And when all the ungodly have been made atheist by the antichrist, and the whole world is overcome by apostacy, the wrath of God shall come upon the ungodly*”

A Commentary on Daniel 7:

“*The Apostle Paul was moved to write in this manner on the Second Coming of Christ, for the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with the command, with the call of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God but the same Apostle also sets forth in order, in his prophetic writings, the End Times coming of the antichrist and his depravity, and after this the glorious appearing of our Saviour”.* In this commentary Eusebius is making three distinct phases of the End Times. First the appearing of the Lord for His Church, second, a time of apostacy among mankind, and third the second coming of Jesus.

Commentary on Isaiah 43:5-6 Eusebius writes

“*Many sons, born by God, I shall gather not my heavenly city, taking them up, flying through the air lofted like birds on the winds. I am talking about angelic powers. Some of them I shall gather to myself from the North, others from Africa, or as some say from the South”.* He also wrote *“In the season of the End, God shall bring them to the city of God, even the heavenly Jerusalem, and prosper them with his supreme boon, when he shall take them up like he did with Elijah, carrying them upon the angelic chariots, bathing them in heavenly light”*

The ancient church fathers taught many things about end-time prophecy. They taught the Second Coming would be approximately two thousand years after the First Coming (AD 32 and AD 2032). The actual writings of church fathers Irenaeus (AD 170), Hippolytus (AD 210), and Ephrem (AD 350) identify three of the ten nations that will become part of the Antichrist’s government and where the Antichrist will be born. They teach about the Psalm 83 war, and many other things. Ephrem The Syrian’s, *The End Times*; Hippolytus’ *The Antichrist and On the End of the World*, are reproduced in their entirety.

**Origen** In his book “Against Celsius” in 2:49 and 6:45-46, he writes *“Paul mentions the antichrist, as a literal person who works false miracles. There is a literal future Antichrist coming…the prophecies in 1 Thessalonians and Daniel are real prophecies about the end of the world. There will be a literal rebuilt temple*”.

**Irenaeus** (a disciple of Polycarp – a disciple of John and 2nd century Greek Bishop)

In **Against Heresies 5.29.1** he says, “And therefore, in the end when the Church is suddenly caught up from this, it is said, «There shall be tribulation such as has not been since the beginning, neither shall be.» For this is the last contest of the righteous, in which, when they overcome, they are crowned with incorruption.” This looks like a pretribulation rapture.

**Against Heresies 5.32.1**. “But it is necessary to say on these things, that it behoves the righteous to be the first in this condition which is being renewed, rising up to the appearance (visible observation) of God to receive the promise of inheritance which God promised to the fathers: afterward to be a judge.”

**Hippolytus:** writing between 190-210AD on the Antichrist comments on Daniel 9,10,11 & 12 and in Chapter 23 interprets Daniel 7 providing more detail about the four kingdoms and Daniels interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s statue (Ch2). His commentary on the ten kings and the little horn confirms what we have been taught but his subsequent chapters particularly Chapter 43 links well to Daniel 9:27 explaining the time of Revelation, the coming of the antichrist, his wars and then his destruction and the arrival of ten kings indicate a pre- millennial rapture and resurrection of believers in Christ. (of current interest is Chapter 52 in which he prophesies the antichrist war against Tyre and Beirut)

**Didache** – The teaching of the Twelve. The oldest church manual, called The teaching of the twelve apostles ... : the Didache and kindred documents in the original, with translations and discussions of post-apostolic teaching, baptism, manuscript. Let us look at Chapter 16

*16:1 Watch concerning your life; let not your lamps be quenched or your loins be loosed, but be ye ready, for ye know not the hour at which our Lord cometh.*[Classic Imminence argument – the verse You shall not know the hour” fits the Rapture perfectly. We only know for certain that the Rapture is approaching]

*16:2 But be ye gathered together frequently, seeking what is suitable for your souls; for the whole time of your faith shall profit you not, unless ye be found perfect in the last time.* [Left behind theory - teleiow = teleioo = ‘perfect’ or in context ‘glorified’ in the Rapture in the Last Days. Make sure you are born-again and remaining faithful to the Lord]

*16:3 For in the last days false prophets and seducers shall be multiplied* (2 Peter 2), *and the sheep shall be turned into wolves, and love shall be turned into hate;*

*16:4 and because iniquity aboundeth (*godlessness in the Last Days – 2 Timothy 3) *they shall hate each other, and persecute each other, and deliver each other up; and then shall the Deceiver of the world appear as the Son of God, and shall do signs and wonders, and the earth shall be delivered into his hands; and he shall do* [this is the tribulation for those who are not Christians] *unlawful things, such as have never happened since the beginning of the world.*

*16:5 Then shall the creation of man come to the fiery trial of proof, and many shall be offended and shall perish; but they who remain in their faith shall be saved by the rock of offence itself.* [Partial resurrection at Jesus second coming]

*16:6 And then shall appear the signs of the truth; first the sign of the appearance in heaven, then the sign of the sound of the trumpet, and thirdly the resurrection of the dead*

*16:7 -- not of all, but as it has been said, The Lord shall come and all his saints with him;*

*16:8 then shall the world behold the Lord coming on the clouds of heaven. [The Second Coming – note the order Rapture – judgement – Second coming]*

{The End of the Didache}

**The theological basis for a Pre-Tribulation Doctrine**

The Rapture can have a similar effect as people are looking at the wrong things or signs to find out when it will happen. It can become like a dream, it will be over in the blink of an eye and as we have had no experience of it before, it is easy to talk of it in the abstract. We are also warned by Jesus that no-one knows the day or the hour of the Rapture – only God, the Father.

I like the humour of Rev Dr Andy Wood a US Prophecy Watcher pastor and speaker, who often says to people who tell him that there is no rapture “don’t worry I’ll explain it to you on the way up…” I also find Galatians 1:4 ( *who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father*), a great riposte to those who accuse me of escapism by believing in the Rapture and to quote Titus 2:13 (*while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ*), a great reply to those who are resigned to live through the Tribulation judgements and evil. I, like the late Dr Ed Hindson, find comfort in the Rapture doctrine. The Calvary Chapel group of churches – firmly believing in the doctrine of pre-Tribulation Rapture – are, unsurprisingly at the forefront of teaching on End Times prophecy, as is Amir Tsarfati the International Messianic Jewish teacher and preacher.

Everyone will know when Jesus is coming back, as everyone will be waiting for Him – from Antichrist and his armies with the other armies of the world at Armageddon, to believers and unbelievers alike – as all they have to do is count exactly seven years from the signing of the covenant Antichrist makes with Israel (Daniel 9:27). Jesus will come on the exact day assigned to Him, just as He did on His first advent (Daniel 9:24-26). Again, everyone will know and be waiting for the Lord at the Second Coming – some in an attempt to battle Him and some to welcome Him with gladness, joy, and worship. This will not be a surprise to the remnant left on earth after seven years of the wrath of God being poured out on man.

There is also a clear reference in Daniel 12:1-2 to a pre-tribulation rapture at which the believing dead will be resurrected to eternal life whereas at the end of the Tribulation unbelievers will be resurrected to eternal death (contempt) . “*At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Everyone who is found written in the book.****2****And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.”*

**Conclusion:**

For the reason which I have set out together with the timetable of 2 Thessalonians 2, I believe that the doctrine of the pre-Tribulation Rapture is correct.

**Bibliography:**

NIV Study Bible: One New Man Bible; NKJV Bible: Amplified Bible

Ancient Post-Flood History/ Ancient Prophecies Revealed– Ken Johnson

God’s Glorious Promise – French & Baguley; The Rapture – Ken Johnson