

Eschatology ABF Series
The Rapture [most of the notes are credited to Dr. Richard Mayhue]
September 29th

Review

Questions to Be Answered

1. What does “rapture” mean?
2. Will there be an eschatological “rapture”?
3. Will the “rapture” be partial or full?
4. Will the “Rapture” Be Pre, Mid, or Post-Trib as it Relates to Daniel’s 70th Week?

Key Texts

Matthew 24–25; I Thessalonians 4; I Corinthians 15; and Revelation 3, 6–18

Eschatological Timeline

Eternity Past – OT (4000 years) – Cross – Church Age (?,?,? years) – Tribulation (7 years) – Millennium (1,000 years) – Eternity Future – Rapture – Second Coming

Pre-Trib (The Second Coming is in two events)

Mid-Trib (The Second Coming is in two events)

Post-Trib (The Second Coming is a single event)

I believe the Pre-Trib position best fits the Biblical texts

What Does “Rapture” Mean?

The English noun/verb “rapture” comes from the Latin noun (raptura) & verb (rapio) which refers to the Greek word ἁρπάζω (harpazo) that is used 14 times in the New Testament. The basic idea of the word is “to remove suddenly or snatch away.” It is used by the New Testament in reference to stealing/plundering (Matthew 11:12; 12:29; 13:19; John 10:12, 28, 29) and removing (John 6:15; Acts 8:39; 23:10; Jude 23).

There is a third use, which focuses on being caught up to heaven. It is used of Paul’s 3rd heaven experience (II Corinthians 12:2, 4) and Christ’s ascension to heaven (Revelation 12:5). Obviously, ἁρπάζω (harpazo) is the perfect word to describe God suddenly taking up the church from earth to heaven as the first part of Christ’s second coming.

However, the term itself contains no hint of the rapture’s time in relationship to Daniel’s 70th week.

Will There Be an Eschatological “Rapture”?

I Thessalonians 4:16-17 unquestionably refers to a rapture that is eschatological in nature. Here, $\alpha\rho\rho\alpha\zeta\omega$ (harpazo) is translated “caught up” (NASB).

“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. 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.”

Isaiah 27:13 *“And in that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain at Jerusalem.”* – the last trumpet summoned the Jewish exiles home from Assyria – not to be confused with the trumpet judgments in Revelation 10:7 – we’ll address this later in the Difficult Questions section.

Without employing $\alpha\rho\rho\alpha\zeta\omega$ (harpazo), but by using similar contextual language,

I Corinthians 15:51-52 refers to the same eschatological event as

I Thessalonians 4:16-17.

“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.”

Thus, we can conclude that Scripture points to the fact of an eschatological rapture, even though neither of these foundational texts contains an explicit time indicator.

Will the “Rapture” Be Partial or Full?

Some have suggested that the rapture spoken of in I Thessalonians 4:16-17 and

I Corinthians 15:51-52 will only be a partial rapture, not a rapture of all who believe.

They reason that participation in the rapture is not based upon one’s true salvation but rather is conditional, based upon one’s deserving conduct.

This theory rests on NT passages that stress obedient watching and waiting,

(Matthew 25:1-13; I Thessalonians 5:4-8; Hebrews 9:28). The result would be that only part of the church is raptured and those who are not raptured would endure through a portion of or through the entire 70th week of Daniel. However, these biblical texts which supposedly teach a partial rapture are better understood as differentiating between true believers who are raptured and merely professing ones who remain behind. Texts that refer to the final aspect of Christ’s second coming are often used mistakenly to support the partial-rapture theory.

The partial rapture theory not only fails to be convincing because of a conclusion that the context of allegedly supporting passages will not support, but it also fails to be compelling for numerous other reasons.

1. I Corinthians 15:51 says that “all” will be changed

2. A partial rapture would logically demand a parallel partial resurrection, which is nowhere taught in Scripture.
3. A partial rapture would minimize and possibly eliminate the need for the judgment seat of Christ, because judgment would have already taken place by virtue of a “partial” rapture.
4. It creates a purgatory of sorts on earth for those believers left behind.
5. A partial rapture is nowhere explicitly taught in Scripture. Therefore, it is concluded that the rapture will be full and complete, not just partial.

Will the “Rapture” Be Pre, Mid, or Post-Trib as it Relates to Daniel’s 70th Week?

The following eight evidences point to a pre-tribulational rapture. They create a far more compelling case than the reasoning given for any other time of the rapture.

1. The Church Is Not Mentioned in Revelation 6–18 as Being on Earth

The common NT term for “church” (ἐκκλησία) is used nineteen times in Revelation 1–3, a section that deals with the historical church of the first century toward the end of the apostle John’s life (ca. A.D. 95). However, “church” is then used only once more in the twenty-two chapter book and that at the very end (22:16) when John returns to addressing the 1st church. Most interesting is the fact that nowhere during the period of Daniel’s 70th week is the term for “church” used for believers on earth (Revelation 4-19).

It is remarkable and totally unexpected that John would shift from detailed instructions for the church to absolute silence about the church in the subsequent 13 chapters if, in fact, the church continued into the tribulation. If the church will experience the tribulation of Daniel’s 70th week, then surely the most detailed study of tribulation events would include an account of the church’s role. But it does not! The only timing of the rapture that would account for this frequent mention of “church” in Revelation 1-3 and total absence of the “church” on earth until Revelation 22:16 is a pre-tribulational rapture which will relocate the church from earth to heaven prior to Daniel’s 70th week.

ADDITIONAL NOTES (NOT FOR CLASS) Today, the church universal is God’s human channel of redemptive truth. Revelation gives certain indications that the Jewish remnant will be God’s human instrument during Daniel’s 70th week. The unbiased reader would certainly be impressed by the abrupt shift from the “church” in Revelation 2–3, to the 144,000 Jews from the twelve tribes in Revelation 7 and 14. He would certainly ask, “Why?”

ADDITIONAL NOTES (NOT FOR CLASS) Further, Revelation 12 is a mini-synopsis of the entire tribulation period and because the woman who gave birth to the male child (Revelation 12:1-13) is Israel, then logically and topically the Tribulation period focuses on the nation of Israel and not the church. How could this be? Because a pre-tribulational rapture has removed the “church” from the earth prior to Daniel’s 70th week.

2. The Rapture Is Rendered Inconsequential if It Is Post-tribulational

1. First, if God miraculously preserves the church through the tribulation, why have a rapture? If it is to avoid the wrath of God at Armageddon, then why would God not continue to protect the saints on earth (as is postulated by post-tribulationism) just as He protected Israel (Exodus 8:22; 9:4, 26; 10:23; 11:7) from His wrath poured out upon Pharaoh and Egypt. Further, if the purpose of the rapture is for living saints to avoid Armageddon, why also resurrect the saints who are already immune at the same time?
2. If the rapture will take place in connection with the Lord's post-tribulational coming, the subsequent separation of the sheep from the goats (see Matthew 25:31-) will be redundant. Separation will have taken place in the very act of translation.
3. If all tribulation believers are raptured and glorified just prior to the inauguration of the millennial Kingdom, who then will populate and propagate the Kingdom? The Scriptures indicate that the living unbelievers will be judged at the end of the tribulation and removed from the earth (Matthew 13:41-42; 25:41). Yet, they also teach that children will be born to believers during the millennium and that these children will be capable of sin (Isaiah 65:20; Revelation 20:7-10). This will not be possible if all believers on earth have been glorified through a post-tribulational rapture.
4. The post-tribulational paradigm of the church being raptured and then immediately brought back to earth leaves no time for the Bema, the Judgment Seat of Christ to occur (I Corinthians 3:10-15; II Corinthians 5:10), nor for the Marriage Supper (Revelation 19:6-10). Thus, it can be concluded that a post-tribulational time of the rapture makes no logical sense, is incongruous with the sheep-goat nation judgment, and, in fact, eliminates two critical end-time events. A pre-tribulational rapture avoids all of these insurmountable difficulties.

3. The Epistles Contain No Preparatory Warnings of an Impending Tribulation for Church-Age Believers

God's instructions to the church through the epistles contain a variety of warnings, but never do they warn believers to prepare for entering and enduring the tribulation of Daniel's 70th week.

They warn vigorously about coming error and false prophets (Acts 20:29-30; II Peter 2:1; I John 4:1-3; Jude 4). They warn against ungodly living (Ephesians 4:25-5:7; I Thessalonians 4:3-8; Hebrews 12:1). They even admonish believers to endure in the midst of present tribulation (I Thessalonians 2:13-14; II Thessalonians 1:4; all of I Peter).

However, there is absolute silence on preparing the church for any kind of tribulation like that found in Revelation 6-18. It is incongruous, then, that the Scriptures would be silent about such a traumatic change for the church. If any time of the rapture other than pre-tribulational were true, one would expect the epistles to teach the fact of the church in the tribulation, the purpose of the church in the tribulation, and the conduct of the church in the tribulation. However, there is no teaching whatsoever. Only a pre-tribulational rapture satisfactorily explains such obvious silence.
