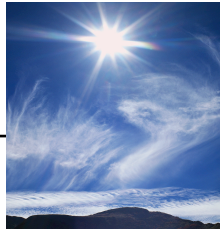


Is the Rapture Next? Part 3



- Do you think Christians will go through the Great Tribulation or will the rapture happen before then?
- Is the rapture next on God's calendar?

A careful study of the various Bible passages that describe Christ's second coming shows that it will occur in **two phases**—the **rapture** and the **return** (also called the **revelation**). One Bible teacher explains Christ's second coming like a *two-act play separated by a seven-year intermission* which is the Tribulation period. The Rapture and the return focus on two different purposes and are separated by time.

Is the Rapture Next on God's Calendar? Or Will the Church Go Through the Great Tribulation?

In the Christian community, there have been DIFFERENT viewpoints concerning the time of the rapture. The debate deals with the question—will Christians go through the seven-year tribulation period or be raptured before it? Are Christians to be looking for the any-moment return of Christ and the rapture, or the horror of the antichrist and the Great Tribulation? There are five major positions concerning the relationship of the rapture to the Tribulation period. (See chart).

1. **The Pre-Tribulation Rapture:** All believers will be raptured *before* the seven years Tribulation.
2. **The Partial Rapture:** Only faithful believers who are *spiritually worthy* will be raptured *before* the Tribulation.
3. **The Mid-Tribulation Rapture:** All believers will be raptured in the *middle* of the Tribulation.
4. **The Pre-Wrath Rapture:** All believers will be raptured *five and a half years* into the Tribulation, just *before* God's wrath is poured upon the wicked world.
5. **The Post-Tribulation Rapture:** All believers surviving the Great Tribulation will be raptured at the end of the 7 years, the same time Jesus returns to the earth.

The conviction of this Bible study is that the rapture happens **before** the seven years Tribulation. The any moment return of Jesus Christ to rapture the Church and take her to the Father's house is the believer's **blessed hope** (Titus 2:13).

The Tribulation is a time of God's judgment & He promised to keep His people from His WRATH.

Review

1. The Anticipation of the Early Church Concerning the **IMMINENT** (Any moment) Return of Christ.
2. The Promise of **EXCLUSION** from the "Hour of Trial"—Revelation 3:10.
3. **The NATURE of the Tribulation Period & God's Promise to Keep His People from His WRATH.**

The NATURE of the Tribulation - The entire Tribulation is God's judgment and condemnation upon this evil world—beginning, middle, and end. God has promised that Christ-followers will not be recipients of His wrath and condemnation.

Many people misunderstand the nature of the Tribulation period. They view it as a time when evil, the devil, and the Antichrist are triumphing and taking control of the earth. However, just the opposite is actually occurring. The entire Tribulation period is a **time of God's judgment and condemnation** upon this evil world (Revelation 6:16-17; 11:16-18; 14:9-10, 18-19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 17-19; 19:15). The entire Tribulation period is a **time of God reclaiming the world from sin and Satan**.

The Beginning of the Tribulation

Revelation 6:16-17 NLT *"16 And they cried to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to survive?'"*

- Q1. Revelation 6 describes the beginning of the Tribulation period and six of the seven seal judgments. According to verses 16-17, who's wrath is described? When does the wrath of the Lamb begin—at the beginning, middle, or end of the Tribulation?

The Middle of the Tribulation

Revelation 14:18-19 NLT *"18 Then another angel, who had power to destroy with fire, came from the altar. He shouted to the angel with the sharp sickle, 'Swing your sickle now to gather the clusters of grapes from the vines of the earth, for they are ripe for judgment.' 19 So the angel swung his sickle over the earth and loaded the grapes into the great winepress of God's wrath."*

- Q2. Revelation 14 describes the middle of the Tribulation period. Who's wrath is pictured (18-19)? What does this indicate about the nature of the Tribulation period?

The Last Third of the Tribulation

Revelation 15:1, 7 NLT *"1 Then I saw in heaven another marvelous event of great significance. Seven angels were holding the seven last plagues, which would bring God's wrath to completion." 7 Then one of the four living beings handed each of the seven angels a gold bowl filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever."*

- Q3. Revelation 15-16 describes the last bowl judgments of the Tribulation. Who's wrath is depicted?

- Q4. What is implied by the statement in verse 1 that God's wrath is being brought to "**completion**"? Why does this suggest that the whole Tribulation period is a time of God's wrath and judgment?

The phrase in Revelation 15:1, "...which would bring God's wrath to completion" suggests that God's wrath has already been in motion for some time. This implies that the seven seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments are **all part of God's wrath** upon this sinful world. This would indicate that the whole Tribulation period is a time of God's wrath and judgment.

Revelation 16:1, 17-19 NLT *"1 Then I heard a mighty voice from the Temple say to the seven angels, 'Go your ways and pour out on the earth the seven bowls containing God's wrath.'" "17 Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air. And a mighty shout came from the throne in the Temple, saying, 'It is finished!' 18 Then the thunder crashed and rolled, and lightning flashed. And a great earthquake struck—the worst since people were placed on the earth. 19 The great city of Babylon split into three sections, and the cities of many nations fell into heaps of rubble. So God remembered all of Babylon's sins, and he made her drink the cup that was filled with the wine of his fierce wrath."*

Q5. It is commonly thought that "Babylon" symbolized the one-world government and religion of the Antichrist during the Tribulation period. *Who's wrath and judgment is indicated by Revelation 16:1, 17-18?*

The NATURE of the Tribulation - Disciplining Israel for Rejecting the Messiah

In addition to the Tribulation being a time when God judges this evil world system, the Tribulation is a time of God disciplining Israel for rejecting the Messiah, Jesus Christ. It is a time when Israel as a nation will finally acknowledge that Jesus is God's Savior and Messiah. **Jeremiah** called the Tribulation *"a time of trouble for my people Israel"* (Jeremiah 30:7 NLT). Also, **Daniel** stated that the Tribulation period was *"decreed for your [Daniel's] people"* [Israel] (Daniel 9:24 NLT). **Zechariah** adds that it will be a time for purifying Israel so that they will turn to Jesus as their Messiah (Zechariah 12:6, 10. Also Romans 11:25-26).

Daniel 9:24 NLT *"24 A period of seventy sets of seven has been decreed for your [Daniel's] people and your holy city to finish their rebellion, to put an end to their sin, to atone for their guilt, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to confirm the prophetic vision, and to anoint the Most Holy Place."* (Verse 27 indicates that the Tribulation is 7 years).

God's Promise to the Church

God has made a promise to the church, the Bride of Christ. He promised that she would not suffer His judgment and condemnation (1 Thessalonians 5:9; 1:10). Jesus already suffered God's wrath on the cross as a substitute for the believer (Romans 8:1; 5:9).

1 Thessalonians 5:9 NLT *"9 For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us."*

Q6. *What promise does 1 Thessalonians 5:9 make about God's wrath (judgment) and His plan for the follower of Jesus Christ?*

1 Thessalonians 1:10 NLT *"10 And they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven—Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment."*

Q7. *What does 1 Thessalonians 1:10 say Jesus has done for the Christ-follower? What does the word rescue (or "delivered." Found only once in the Greek N.T.) mean to you?*

Romans 8:1 NLT *"1 So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus."*

Romans 5:9 NLT *"9 And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation."*

Q8. *According to Romans 8:1 and 5:9, what is the relationship between those who belong to Christ and God's judgment?*

Some people object by saying that Christians have always suffered and been mistreated throughout history. But in reply, there is a **difference** between experiencing **the wrath of other humans** from experiencing **wrath from God**. According to the Bible, the Bride of Christ will **never suffer the wrath and condemnation of God**.

If the Tribulation is a time of God's wrath, and if God has promised to keep His people from His wrath and condemnation, **then the church must be excluded from the Tribulation period**. The church must be raptured before the Tribulation. **As the Bride of Christ—every Christian has a special place in the heart of God and He will not subject the Bride to His wrath, judgment, and condemnation!** God is not a wife-beater! He never abuses the ones He loves.

Some Final Thoughts

Where is the Church? Where Is the Rapture?

A careful examination of the book of Revelation shows that both the Church and the Rapture **are absent** from the detailed description of the Tribulation period. From Revelation 6 (the beginning of the Tribulation) to Revelation 19 (the end of the Tribulation and the Return of Christ) there is **no clear mention of the Church**. This is peculiar. The Church is mentioned repeatedly in Revelation 1-3 before the Tribulation, but absent from its following chapters detailing the Tribulation period. Also, **the Rapture is not mentioned** even though it has major importance to the Church and the End Times teaching.

Why would **the Rapture** not be mentioned in the book of Revelation? Why would there be no clear indication of **the church** during the Tribulation?

One possible explanation is that the Church is absent from Revelation 6-18 because it has been raptured. It is in the Father's House (John 14:1-3) during the time the Tribulation occurs on earth. It had the promise of not being a recipient of God's judgment and condemnation and was consequently removed before the Tribulation started.

Furthermore, the Rapture may not be mentioned because it does not pertain to the main message of the book of Revelation. The focus of Revelation is **God's judgment on sin and Satan, Christ's return** (Revelation 19), **Christ's Millennial kingdom, the Great White Throne Judgment** (Revelation 20), and **the restoration of Paradise** (the New Heaven and Earth—Revelation 21-22). The Rapture is not relevant to these events. It pertains to the Church, not Revelation's central message of judgment and restoration of this sinful world.

What do you think?