

Rapture

Rapture of the Saints and When Will This Happen

Rapture Before Tribulation: Everyone knows God is in heaven, and Jesus ascended to heaven where He sits today at the right hand of God. Paul tells us that when he himself died, he (his spirit and soul), would “depart” and be with Christ” (Phil. 1:23). He also said, “For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit” (Col. 2:5).

Obviously then, when a Christian dies, his soul and spirit goes to be with Christ in the Father’s house, that is, in heaven. His or her body of course, remains in the grave until the resurrection, which for the Christian is at the end of the Church age just before the Tribulation. That is why we locate the Rapture at this spot in the flow of events in the book of Revelation. There are at least 4 reasons for locating it here.

1. The location of this event is right for the Rapture. Revelation (chapters 4 and 5), present a vision in heaven, and (chapter 6), introduces the Tribulation period. John, one of the first true members of the Church of Jesus Christ, is a fitting symbol of the Church being taken out of the world just before the Tribulation begins, as our Lord promised: “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth” (Rev. 3:10).
2. The absence of any mention of the Church in the rest of Revelation indicates that it is not on the earth during the Tribulation. There are 16 references to the Church (in Rev. chapters 1 to 3), whereas (chapters 6-18), which cover the Tribulation, do not mention the Church once.
3. The extensive use of Old Testament language and symbols (in Revelation Chapters 4 to 18); is an indication of Israel, not the Church. This is understandable since the Church Age is the time of the Gentiles, whereas the Tribulation is the time of Jacob’s trouble, or the seventieth week of Daniel determined by God for His dealings with Israel. Some of these Old Testament symbols are the tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, the altar, elders, censers, cherubim, seals, trumpets, and plagues.
4. There is much similarity between the events of Revelation 4:1-2), and other scriptural teaching on the Rapture, such as (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

None of the above four reasons are sufficient in itself to insist that (Revelation 4:1-2), refers to the Rapture of the Church. When, however, all of them are considered together, we are inclined to believe that this inference can rightly be made. The Rapture of the Church is not explicitly taught (in Rev. chapter 4), but definitely appears here chronologically at the end of the Church Age and before the Tribulation.

We’ll turn to other passages of Scripture that specifically deal with the Rapture so that we may be clearly informed of what the Bible teaches on the subject. The first thing that occurs in John’s vision of the future (after Jesus’ own revelation of the Church Age described in chapters 2 and 3 – the seven Churches), is the calling of John up to the Father’s house in heaven; this fact has to be instructive.

John obviously represents the Church, and because the door opening in heaven and the personal invitation of Christ Himself to “come up here” certainly parallels other prophetic passages (e.g. 1 Thess. 4:16). These factors all detail the Rapture of the Church.

Most prophecy scholars are reluctant to say that (Rev. 4:1-2), are a direct teaching of the Rapture because it does not specifically say so or give us any additional details about that event. However, John is the seer and is writing about future events even in his day, what better way to allude to the Rapture at this specific time, particularly since it is located right after the description of the Church Age and just prior to the revelation of the Antichrist.

The Apostle Paul was the special writer God chose to reveal to the Church the wonderful details of the Rapture, when all Christians, both the dead and the living, will be “caught up” (or Raptured), to heaven to be with Christ (1 Thess. 4:16-17). Jesus mentioned it only once (in John 14:2-3). Jesus spoke of His second coming many times, but in every other instance He had the climactic event Paul calls the “glorious appearing” in mind. That is usually the event most people think of when they speak of the many promises (318 total), in the New Testament regarding the second coming of Christ.

There is only one “second coming”, but it occurs in two phases. The first phase is only for His church, that all living and dead believers since the church was founded (in 33 A.D.) For the Second Coming, see Rev. 19:14-16). The second phase is for all those living on the earth at the end of the Tribulation. That the Glorious Appearing will take place at the end of the Tribulation just before the Millennium cannot be questioned for Jesus predicted that His Glorious Appearing would come “immediately after the distress of those days” (Matt. 24:29).

Millions of Christians expect Christ to return at any moment, as the many Rapture passages listed above teach. He will not disappoint us! He will come, and His coming could be at any moment. But that coming is for His Church only, which is made up of all true believers everywhere who have received Him personally by faith.

Many of the texts for the Rapture teach an imminent coming of Christ. That means He could come at any moment. Take, for example, one of the first teachings on the Rapture (in 1 Thess. 1:9-10: “for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God”, “and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath”).

These Thessalonian Christians were not sitting around waiting for the Rapture, they were “serving the living and true God” in an attitude of expectancy “to wait for his Son.” That is the way it should be.

We should keep in mind that no matter if the Christian is a Pre, Mid or Post Tribulation believer, that they all have scriptural reasons for their views, and they should all be regarded as fellow believers. This is a timing issue and not a Salvation issue. Some of the mid and post Tribulation believers are even now coming out with books instructing Christians to prepare for life in the Tribulation.

That's interesting in view of the fact that not one verse can be found in the New Testament instructing Christians on how to live during that seven-year period. The obvious reason is that Christians will not be living on earth at that time; they will be in Heaven. I'm sure the mid and post tribers wouldn't complain when they find themselves leaving with the pre-tribulation believers.

For several years a popular argument against the pre-Tribulation theory of the "blessed hope" phase of Christ's return is that it was invented by John Darby (in 1828), and was never seen or mentioned by the early Christian fathers for almost nineteen centuries of church history. That argument is simply not true. John Darby claimed he got the inspiration for the pre-Tribulation rapture of Christ in 1828 after he saw the distinction between Israel and the Church in his study of the book of Ephesians.

Few scholars who do not make that distinction see a pre-Tribulation rapture of the Church. In fact, separating Israel and the Church is one of the major keys to rightly understanding Bible prophecy. The second key is taking the prophetic Scriptures literally whenever possible.

The concept of a pre-Tribulation Rapture was obviously known during the first three centuries of the church and did not lose its challenge until the Bible was effectively locked up in museums or monasteries for the 1100 years of the Dark Ages. Although several who had access to the Scriptures (and who could read Greek or Latin), saw it even during those years.

It was not until the Bible was translated into the language of the common people that the hope of the pre-millennial return of Christ was reestablished in the Church. Then in the 18th and 19th centuries, the ancient truth of the Rapture before the Tribulation was rediscovered. And wherever this truth has been taught, it has had the same effect on believers that it had in the first three centuries. It produced holy living in an unholy age, a drive for evangelism, and a zeal for missions.

Although the Antichrist and his followers will be delighted that the Church has been taken out of this world, many thoughtful individuals will be seriously impressed by the mysterious evacuation of millions of people. Some have suggested, and I think rightfully so, that the Rapture will leave its mark on humankind.

Consider for a moment what would happen if the Rapture took place while Christian airline pilots were flying their 747's or DC 10's loaded with people. Or think of the impact on humanity when hundreds of Christian train engineers and bus and automobile drivers are suddenly snatched from the controls of their moving vehicles.

Because Christians have invaded almost every legitimate profession, the Rapture will leave an unprecedented vacancy and cause the most chaotic and disruptive consequences that have ever been created by a single event. Yes, the world will be fully aware of the supernatural aspect of the Rapture of millions from all over the world, particularly when they discover that the only common denominator of those raptured is their personal faith in Christ.

The impact of these strange events will soon be forgotten by the majority of those living in the Tribulation because of the lies and deceit of the Antichrist, who will sign a covenant with Israel and start his diplomatic conquest of world government. But many reflective, perceptive individuals will not forget the effects created by this strange Rapture, which will doubtless stir a revival of interest in prophetic studies among them. Such a mental climate will provide fertile ground for the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (see article 144.000).

The Rapture: At that moment, the graves containing every believer who has ever died since Pentecost will open. The molecules of every one of those believers will be reconstituted. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, they will be raised, in perfect, immortal bodies. Those bodies will ascend into the air where they will be met by Jesus Christ, their Redeemer. The believers who are still alive will vanish immediately thereafter, and will ascend with them to meet the Lord in the air. The Bible says it this way:

1 Thess. 4:13-18 “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”. “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus”. “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”. “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. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

Skeptics are fond of pointing out that the word “Rapture” does not appear in the bible. Well, the word “Bible” doesn’t appear in the Bible, either. The word “rapture” comes from the Latin word *rapio*, which means, literally, to be “caught up” or “snatched away.” *Rapio* is translated into Latin from the Greek word *harpazo* which means “to seize, or to carry off by force.” The Rapture is a non-sign event. That means it comes without warning. Don’t be fooled by people who tell you they have calculated the date. It’s not only impossible, but also knowledge forbidden to men and known only by God.

When Paul wrote his Epistle to the Thessalonians, he addressed a heretical notion that was already being circulated by a forged letter to the Thessalonians. It taught that the Rapture had already taken place, and that the Thessalonians had been left behind.

Paul explains in detail the order of events, beginning with: 2 Thess. 2:1-2 “Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him”, “That you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come”

The Rapture is Imminent. One of the chief characteristics of the Rapture of the church is that it will be sudden, unexpected, and will catch people by surprise. Some students of Scripture will anticipate “the season” or general period, but as our Lord said, “No man knows the day or the hour.” Which is why we should so live as to “be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour

when you do not expect Him? (Matt 24:44). Only the pre-Tribulation rapture preserves that at any moment expectation of His coming.

An Incredible Growing Delusion: Luke 17:26-30 “And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the [coming of the] Son of man”. “They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all”. “Likewise, also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded”; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all”. “Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed”.

Here we have additional evidence which argues powerfully for a pre-tribulation Rapture. The coming of Christ will be at a time similar to the days of Noah and Lot. These were times of great wickedness, and in that respect our generation is similar. However, states Dave Hunt, that is not the point being made, for nothing is said about those evil days. The emphasis, instead, is upon the fact that life was normal (eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, building), and the fact that the last thing expected was judgment. So, it will be when Christ returns. Jesus Himself said so.

Once again, we see the Rapture and the Second Coming must be two separate events occurring at different times. Surely the verses above do not describe either the economic situation or mood on earth at the time of the Second Coming. Consequently, another event must be the topic. The Second Coming occurs (in Rev. 19:11-16). The previous chapters have described the progressive devastation of earth that has at this time reached almost unimaginable catastrophic proportions. Life is not normal at all.

Even eating and drinking is a problem, for famine has been rampant (Rev. 6:5-6), a third of the trees and all green grass has been burned up, a third of the ocean has turned to blood, and a third of earth's waters has become bitter and poisonous (Rev. 8:7-11). Nor is buying, selling, planting, building, or any part of life normal.

More than a billion people have died from plagues and war. There have been cataclysmic upheavals of nature which have left earth pulverized and her inhabitants in desperate straits. Certainly, the conditions on earth at the time of the Second Coming are exactly the opposite of those to which Christ refers. In the days of Noah and Lot, judgment from God was unknown and the last thing those about to suffer it would have expected.

Christ Could Only Have in Mind a Pre-Trib Rapture: When Christ says, “As it was in the days of Noah and Lot,” it is absolutely certain that He is not describing conditions that will prevail at the time of the Second Coming. Therefore, these must be the conditions which will prevail just prior to the Rapture at a different time and obviously before the devastation of the tribulation period. A pre-tribulation Rapture is, therefore, imperative. But the symbolism is wrong objects some.

Christ's statement in Matthew 24:39 says: “And knew not until the flood came and took them [i.e., the wicked] all away”. From this it is argued that it wasn't Noah and his family who were

believers that was taken away, but the unbelievers. Thus, there won't be a Rapture at all, but the wicked will be taken away to judgment and the righteous will remain upon the earth. So goes the common argument. Actually, Both Noah and those who rejected his preaching were taken away.

Noah and his family were taken away but the ark, borne up on the water (a picture, though not a perfect one, of the Rapture), and the wicked were taken away to death by the waters of judgment. When it comes to Lot, the symbolism is crystal clear. He and his family were definitely taken out of Sodom by the angels (a type of Rapture), and after their departure to safety, God's judgment fell (a type of the Tribulation). The pre-tribulation Rapture could not be depicted more accurately.

It is often argued that belief in a pre-trib rapture leaves one unprepared to face Antichrist and susceptible to deception. The facts are just the opposite. It is those who deny the Rapture who have set themselves up for the most horrible deception. Antichrist will pretend to be the very "Christ" whom they expect to come to earth to reign. He will congratulate them on the good work they've done in preparing the world for his rule. Hundreds of millions of those who call themselves Christians will be completely deceived.

In actual fact, a belief in the Rapture is the surest way to be kept from deception. Wherever a "Christ" comes from when he arrives on the scene, if he doesn't resurrect all dead Christians and catch them and the living up into heaven, then he is a fraud. That is something which the Antichrist, for all his bag of tricks and lying signs and wonders, will not be able to perform. If one doesn't believe in the Rapture (in being caught up into heaven), it might then be conceivable that the Antichrist could put on such a psychic show of satanic power that many would think he was Christ.

Paul warned of the "lawless one" in 2 Thess.

2 Thess. 2:9-12 "Even him whose coming is after (by the power of), Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders", "and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved". "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie": "That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness".

Pre Trib – Key to the Puzzle: Matt. 24:29-31 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light". "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other". The verses from Matthew present the strongest Scripture for a post tribulation Rapture. According to the advocates of this view, there simply is no argument against what seems to be stated in the plainest terms: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall gather together his elect from the four winds".

What about the elect? The above may sound logical, is the rejoinder of post trib advocates, but this passage clearly says that He catches up His elect. That must refer to the Church, so this can only be the Rapture. There is the sound of a trumpet too (just as in chapters 1 Thess. 4 and 1 Cor.

15). It couldn't be clearer: The Rapture takes place in conjunction with the Second Coming at the end of the Great Tribulation.

But wait, we've already shown why these two events cannot occur at the same time. Moreover, this passage, from its very language, confirms that fact. Look at verse 31 again and note some contrast between it and the Rapture passages. In 1 Thess. 4 we have "the voice of the archangel and the trump of God"; here we have "a great sound of a trumpet" but no archangel. At the Rapture it is Christ Himself who catches us up to meet Him in the air. Here it is "his angels" who "gather together his elect." Nor is there anything about being caught up to meet Him in the air.

The term "gather together" is altogether different. The gathering together is "from the four winds" or from the four corners of the earth under heaven, obviously to a single location on this earth, not to a rendezvous in the sky. It is His elect who are being gathered together.

Who would they be? That term is used for the Church, but also for Israel: "For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect" (Isaiah 45:4). If it were the Church in view here, they would be caught up to meet Christ in the air. Instead, they are being gathered back to their own land for the Messiah's millennial reign exactly as the Hebrew prophets foretold.

We have given many biblical reasons for a pre-tribulation Rapture. We've shown that Daniel's seventieth week can't ever start to run its course until the church is removed. Now we have added a logical reason: Antichrist could not ascent to power without the Rapture terrifying the entire world into uniting under him. The Bible gives at least 2 reasons which support this view.

1. First of all is the timing of Antichrist's ascension to power, see Article "Antichrist". There are those who suggest that it cannot occur until the middle of the seven-year period. They can't imagine how he could gain control any earlier. However, he makes a covenant of peace with the many for that entire week, so he must be in power at the beginning. He breaks the covenant "in the midst of the week", so he can hardly just come to power at that time, since it is a covenant which he has made 3-1/2 years earlier. The conclusions present a cohesive picture. The 70th week can't begin, nor can Antichrist be revealed until the Church is removed in the Rapture. Yet he must be in full power immediately thereafter in order to make the covenant at the beginning of the 70th week as Daniel declared (see Article Daniels 70 Weeks). Logically it is the Rapture itself which both allows Antichrist to be revealed and terrifies the world into an otherwise impossible unity and catapults him suddenly into control of the world.
2. Second, Paul tells the Thessalonians: "You know what withholdeth that he [Antichrist] might be revealed in his time". "For he who now hinders will hinder until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed" (2 Thess. 2:6-8). A person is preventing the Antichrist from being revealed. Quite clearly, He is no ordinary person, for He who prevented Antichrist's revelation in Paul's day 1900 years ago is still doing it today. He is not only timeless but Omnipotent, for Satan cannot act until this One is out of the way. Paul can only be referring to the Holy Spirit. But he cannot be removed from earth because He is Omnipresent. Furthermore, there will be many converted through the gospel of the kingdom during the Great Tribulation, and for that to be possible the Holy Spirit must be present to convince and convict them. Then what is the meaning of "until

he be taken out of the way”? How could that apply to the Holy Spirit? The Church is described as “a habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22). The bodies of all Christians are the “temples of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19). God the Holy Spirit is present in this world in a unique way that was not true before the Church was formed nor will be so after the Church is removed in the Rapture. When the Church is taken to heaven, that special presence of the Holy Spirit will also be removed, though He will be here as God omnipresent as He eternally is throughout the entire universe.

More Reasons Why the Church Must Be Removed: The true Church would not tolerate the Antichrist for a moment. She would expose his identity, prove it from Scripture, and oppose him. She would actively warn others and stand solidly in the way of Antichrist and his diabolical machinations. Satan’s plans through Antichrist cannot go forward until the Church has been removed. Furthermore, if the Church were present during the Great Tribulation, she would be wiped out by the Antichrist. But that would not be allowed by God.

He who protects the Church, who said “the gates of hell shall not prevail against” her, is the same One who gives Antichrist the power to “make war with the saints and overcome [kill] them [and that] as many as would not worship the image of the beast [antichrist] should be killed” (Rev. 13:7 and 15). The only way both to protect the Church and allow Antichrist to kill all saints is to remove the Church. The saints who are killed by Antichrist are those who have previously rejected the truth and become believers in Christ during the Great Tribulation. They pay for their faith with their blood.

The Rapture Will Occur When Least Expected: The Second Coming takes place only after all the signs have been given and everyone should know that Christ is about to return in glory and power. The Rapture comes in the midst of peace (1 Thess. 5:3), the Second Coming in the midst of war (Rev. 19:11-21). One simply cannot put into one time frame and one event the mutually exclusive statements made in the New Testament about the Rapture and the Second Coming.

A post tribulation “Rapture” would be a classic nonevent. There would be few if any believers in Christ to take to heaven. They would all have been killed, for such is the fate of those who refuse to take the mark of the beast [Antichrist] and worship his image. Submission to Antichrist is the only way to stay alive during that horrible period.

For those, however, who take the mark of the beast and worship his image there is an even worse fate: “If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand”, “The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture” “And they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name” (Rev. 14:9-11). See article: Mark of the Beast.

Finally, a post-tribulation Rapture removes an essential factor involved in the Rapture: Imminency. The Bible, as we know, teaches that Christ could come at any time in history. Nor is there anything that prevents Him from coming at this moment.

A Secret Rapture: – It is increasingly popular, even among evangelicals in these last days, to mock the idea of a “secret” Rapture. Yet this is the teaching of Scripture, and it makes good

sense. The world will not see what transpires, for at least 2 reasons. First of all, the Rapture is an intimate meeting between Christ and His bride and has nothing to do with those who have rejected Him, so why should they be allowed to witness it? They were invited to participate but refused (Luke 14:16-24).

Secondly, if all the world witnessed this event, the mystery would be removed and the false explanation that helps Antichrist seize power would not be possible. It is not God's will for the world to understand the truth about what has happened. From the moment of the Rapture, all those who refused the love of the truth are under a strong delusion from God to believe the lies of Antichrist and Satan. The last thing they would believe, or that God wants them to believe, is that the Rapture has occurred.

The First Teacher of Imminency: "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord. Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching ... that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not" (Luke 12:35-40).

The expectation held by the New Testament Church of Christ's imminent return was not attributable only to the teaching of the apostles. It came first of all from the words of Christ Himself. He taught repeatedly that His coming was imminent. Here Christ urges upon His followers two things:

1. To maintain a high state of readiness for His return; and
2. To continue to watch for His return. That He is teaching the imminence of and thus a pre-tribulation Rapture cannot be denied. It is incredible that anyone could read the words of our Lord Himself and conclude that He could not return until the Antichrist had first appeared, or until the middle or end of the Tribulation period, much less the end of the millennium! (In Matt. chapter 24), we have the same exhortations: "Watch therefore: for you know not what hour your Lord doth come" (verse 42), and "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (verse 44).

A Complacent, Sleeping Church: In (Matthew chapter 25), Christ warns that the Church will likely be asleep when He comes to catch His bride away. Yes, five virgins are wise and five foolish. Apparently because the five foolish do not have oil in their lamps (a symbol of the Holy Spirit), they are not genuine Christians. Be that as it may, the following declaration from the Lord is more than sobering: "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept" (Matt. 25:5).

This wise slept along with the foolish! "The bridegroom tarried" and somehow it just didn't seem as though he'd be coming in the next few hours, so they took that opportunity to get some sleep, and that's when he came! Now we see why the Lord coupled His exhortation to watch and to be ready with the warning that He would come at a time when we wouldn't expect Him, when somehow it just wouldn't seem that He'd be coming then.

That description just doesn't fit the end of the Great Tribulation! Again, we have Imminency. He could come at any time: Watch, be ready! We also have as clear a presentation as one could ask for of the fact that He won't come at the end of Daniel's seventieth week in the midst of Armageddon. No one would be complacently sleeping then or doubting that it was the right time for Him to come!

How Close Are We: "But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming" ... "The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him" (Matt. 24:48 and 50).

"While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept". "And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" ... "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 25:5-6 and 13).

Let us briefly summarize the conclusions we have reached from carefully comparing Scripture with Scripture. In the preceding chapters we have noted a number of seeming contradictions in what Christ and the apostle said about His return:

He comes at a time of peace and yet in the midst of war; He comes when no one would expect Him, and yet He comes when all of the prophesied signs have been displayed to the world and even Antichrist knows He is about to descend to the earth. He comes when judgment is the last thing anyone on earth would expect, yet He comes to a world very much aware that God's divine wrath and judgment are being poured out upon it. We have found that the only possible way to reconcile these contrary statements is to recognize that they are referring to two separate events: The Rapture and Second Coming. The differences may be simplified in this way:

1. At the Rapture, Christ comes for His saints at a time of peace and business as usual before the tribulation; whereas:
2. At the Second Coming 7 years later, He comes from heaven with all of His saints (they have previously been taken there), to rescue Israel in the midst of Armageddon at the end of the Great Tribulation.

Imminency – Its Purifying and Motivating Power: Contrary to what the critics say, the hope of Christ's imminent return doesn't lead to spiritual lethargy or an escapist mentality which shuns responsibility and trial. Rather it causes us to witness more earnestly and to live holier lives, knowing that very little time for doing so may remain. Such was the impact this hope had upon the early Church, a motivating and purifying influence, which has been largely lost and surely needs to be recovered.

Paul himself indicates that the love of Christ's appearing was the driving force of his life. "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand". "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith": "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

What has been the result of rejecting Imminency? It could not help but foster a worldlier orientation. It surely has not increased the love Christians have for their Lord. Nor has the tragic loss of Imminency fostered holy living or an increased sense of urgency in spreading the gospel. Instead, Christians have set their hope and affection on the status, security, pleasures, and possessions offered by this evil world.

Hoping for Heaven, But Not Yet: For most Christians, heaven is a place they desire to reach eventually, but not until they have lived out their full days on earth. Their hopes, ambitions, and interest, contrary to what Christ taught and the early Church lived, are really bound up in the life they aspire to live in this world. Heaven is a distant and unreal destination they reluctantly expect to reach at the end of life, but it is not desired before then. To be suddenly Raptured to heaven would be, for most Christians, an un-welcomed interruption of their earthly plans and ambitions.

Unfortunately, such an indictment applies even to many who intellectually believe in the pre-trib Rapture. Though mental assent is given to the doctrine, the truth of imminency has not gripped them. The awesome reality of suddenly at any moment being caught up to meet Christ in the air has not affected their lives. Instead, the Rapture is like a tale that has been told, something they believe in theoretically but which they have little if any expectation of experiencing in their lifetime.

Tragically, even those who claim to believe in the imminent return of Christ often do not live as Christ said they should, with “loins girded about and lights burning ... as men who wait for their Lord when he will return” (Luke 12:35-36). Only if His imminent return is our constant hope will we live as true followers of Christ, those who live as citizens of heaven and who are looking for their Lord to catch them up to His Father’s house at any moment.

Was there ever a bride truly in love who didn’t eagerly anticipate the wedding day when she and her fiancée could be united and begin to share their lives together? One longs to be with the one loved; and if that possibility is not a distant or vague hope but one which could be realized at any moment, then love is strengthened by it. To know, however, that one cannot see or be with the one loved for many years does not help the relationship.

There are some who desire the Rapture to be delayed, and many who think they have biblical reasons for believing that it cannot occur until after Antichrist appears, or the Great Tribulation has ended, or even until the end of the millennium. Yet Christ says that such thoughts are the first step in the wrong direction. It is always an “evil” servant who imagines his Lord won’t come just yet and therefore he had time to live for self.

The very words John uses, “everyone who has this hope in him purifieth himself”, argue for imminency. If he is simply referring to some distantly future coming in which we could not possibly participate, such as a post-millennial coming, then there is no hope at all and thus no purifying effect. Nor would a post tribulation Rapture, as we have already seen, qualify as a purifying “hope” for the reasons we have given.

John is not recommending a fanatical, other worldly mindedness that foolishly ignores any commonsense provision for this life. We are to live as those who long to leave this earth and who

expect to depart at any moment, yet who also make contingency plans in case the Rapture is delayed. One must prudently plan and provide for this life without resting one's hope or placing one's affection upon it. The pre-trib Rapture goes to the heart of the battle between God and Satan for the souls of mankind. The choice we each face, surprisingly, is not heaven or hell. If that were the case, who would not choose heaven?

The real choice we must and do make, daily, hourly, is between heaven and this earth. Only the possibility of an imminent Rapture confronts us with that choice. Our attitudes and actions continually reflect our unconscious answer to the question: "Am I willing to leave this earth right now for heaven, or is there something that holds me here and thus something of earth which stands between my Lord and me at this moment?" When we honestly face that choice, we begin to understand why Paul exhorted, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."

How close are we? The real question is, rather, how close we desire the Rapture to be. Such is the heart-searching impact of imminency and of Christ's many warnings to watch and wait and to be ready for His return at any moment. Is the Rapture something we really want right now, or do we wish for a delay? Yes, our hearts are torn because we long for unsaved friends and loved ones to receive Christ before it is forever too late. But nothing must stand in the way of our love for Him. May the hope of His imminent return become our passion and produce its purifying fruit in our lives, and through us, impact many others before it is forever too late.

The Restraining Influence: The Apostle Paul warned of the last days removal of God's protective restraining influence through the Holy Spirit's special residence in the world in the mystical true Church. But at this point of the well-defined scenario of predicted future events, all living true believers from within the various denominations of the visible Church will have been instantly and mysteriously removed.

And Then the special age of the Holy Spirit's residence in the world in the true believers will have ended with the same event. This event, commonly called the Rapture, reverses Pentecost, and the Holy Spirit returns basically to His Old Testament ministry (2 Thess. 2:1-13).

Let me ask you this: If believers were around to see the emergence of the Antichrist, the invasion of Israel by Russia and the other major signs of the end time that occur during the Tribulation period, would they not be expecting Jesus to come for them at any moment? Any believer alive at that time would certainly be anticipating this event. Yet Jesus tells us that He will come for us suddenly and without a specific warning. Therefore, we cannot be around to see those things, as we will be gone. No one knows the day or the hour.

Don't believe anyone who tells you otherwise. But Jesus did give us a way of knowing the general times. Just read (Luke 21:29-32). Or study the parable of the fig tree (in Matt. 24:32-34). Jesus tells us clearly that the generation that sees the beginnings of these signs will see the fulfillment of all the prophecies leading to the Second Coming.

Well folks, Israel has been reborn. Jerusalem is under the rulership of the Jews again. We are already experiencing the beginnings of the persecution of the church. False prophets are emerging. Deceiving spirits are leading many astray. The world is headed for global government.

Weather patterns are changing. There are plagues and earthquakes and volcanoes. How else can one explain this convergence of activity?

When I refer to the end times or last days, which I believe we are presently in, I am referring to a period of between 7-10 years. The thing that begins the 7-year tribulation period is the signing of the covenant between the Antichrist and Israel. However, we will never see it. That is if you believe in pre-tribulation. The Rapture will occur sometime before, but it is not known exactly when.

- Date setters should be ignored or rebuked as false teachers.
- “Of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Matt. 24:36).
- “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:7).
- The Lord said in the parable of the fig tree that we can know the general time of His coming. As Jesus said, “So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near, at the doors” (Matt. 24:33).

After the Rapture and before the Glorious Appearing, the Holy Spirit will again be poured out on the earth like on the day of Pentecost, leading millions to the Savior.

Joel 2:28-32 “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions”: “And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those day will I pour out my spirit”. “And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke”. “The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come”. “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered; for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call”. For those who do not know, this is a direct reference to the time of tribulation after the Rapture.

What About the Rapture: Most pre-millennial scholars place the rapture of the church before the Tribulation. The biggest misconception of some pre-tribulationists is that the second coming of Christ for His Church (the Rapture), and the beginning of the tribulation period are simultaneous. They may be, but no passage of Scripture requires it. We must remember that the Tribulation is not started by the rapture of the church but by the signing of the covenant between the Antichrist and Israel.

Admittedly, (1 Thess. 4:17-18 and 2 Thess. chapter 2), which describe the Rapture, the Tribulation, and the revelation of the man of sin or Antichrist, parallel the signing of the covenant. But it is important not to tie them together. The Rapture could take place several years prior to the tribulation period. The closer we get to the actual occurrence of these events, however, the more we are inclined to believe that they could happen in close succession.

If they do indeed occur in close proximity or simultaneously, the church will still be on earth when Russia invades Israel and is destroyed by God. Any chronology of the Rapture and the

invasion of Israel is speculative and should be given wide flexibility. However, it is instructive to examine some of the possibilities.

Grant Jeffrey, a current prophecy scholar and speaker has done extensive research into the writings of many prophecy teachers prior to the 18th century. In his book *Apocalypse*, he quotes many who had a definite understanding of the difference between the two phases of our Lord's coming, particularly His coming for His people prior to the Tribulation and the revealing of the "man of sin."

His most important contribution was his electrifying discovery of a statement in an apocalyptic sermon from the 4th century. Designated Pseudo-Ephraim, there is some question that it was really written by Ephraim of Nisibis (306-373 A.D.), a prolific Syrian church father. Some prefer a later date for this homily, called "Sermon on the End of the World," and suggest it may not have been written until (565 – 627 A.D.). The real date is immaterial, for allowing its composition as late as the 7th century proves that even at this early date, 1100 years before Darby, some Christians saw the Rapture occurring before the Tribulation.

In challenging Christians to holy living, the ancient author wrote. Why therefore do we not reject every care of earthly actions and prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Christ, so that he may draw us from the confusion, which overwhelms all the world? All the saints and elect of God are gathering together before the tribulation, which is to come, and are taken to the Lord, in order that they may not see at any time the confusion which overwhelms the world because of our sins.

Jesus declared to Peter: "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19).