

Does the Rapture Occur **Before** the Tribulation or **During** the Tribulation?

(Pre-Trib or Mid-Trib?)

A. Presuppositions

1. WordExplain is unabashedly Pre-Tribulation in stance. That is, WordExplain takes the position that Christ's return for His Bride, the Church, takes place prior to the Tribulation period.
2. WordExplain believes that God has separate, distinct programs for the Church and for the Nation of Israel.
 - a. It is undeniable that we are presently in the Church Age. God's primary focus today is the Church. Christ will take His Bride, the Church to be with Him in His Father's House (John 14:1-6).
 - b. At some point shortly after that God's program for the Nation of Israel will resume, for it had been put "on hold" during the Church Age. The Tribulation is known as the time of "Jacob's Distress" (Jer. 30:7, NASB) or "Jacob's Trouble" (Jer. 30:7, KJV).
3. A primary passage concerning God's Time-Table for the Nation of Israel is to be found in Daniel 9:24-27. This is the revelation to Daniel of Seventy Seven's (of Years) that circumscribe a significant portion of Israel's history. The first Sixty-Nine Sevens of Years have been completed. There has been an enormous gap of time (nearly two Millennia) between the completion of the Sixty-Nine Sevens of Year and the as-yet-to-begin Seventieth Seven of Years.
 - a. What will begin the Seventieth Seven of Years is that the "Prince to Come" will initiate a Seven-Year Peace Treaty with Israel (Dan. 9:27).
 - b. In the middle of that Seven-Year Treaty he will break the Treaty. He will stop sacrifices in a rebuilt Israeli temple, and he will set up an idol in the temple.
 - c. Jesus references that "Abomination of Desolation" in Matthew 24:15. He stated that at that time there would be "great tribulation" "such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will."
 - d. Since this Seven-Year period is a time when God has resumed specifically and directly working with the Nation of Israel, it seems most logical to conclude that the Church is not present during this time.

B. The Terminology of the Book of Revelation

1. **The Outline of Revelation.** The “inspired” outline of the Book of Revelation is given by Jesus in Revelation 1:19. The Apostle John has just been shocked by a vision and message from the risen Christ (Rev. 1:9-16). When John saw Christ, he fell at His feet as if he were a dead man (Rev. 1:17). Then Jesus told him to write down “the things which you have seen” (his vision of Christ) (Rev. 1); “the things which are” – the Church Age, with messages to the Seven Churches” (Rev. 2-3); and the things which will take place after these things” (Rev. 4-22) – primarily the Tribulation period, (Rev. 6-18), followed by the Second Coming of Christ in Power (Rev. 19), followed by the Millennium (Rev. 20:1-6), followed by Satan’s Final Revolt (Rev. 20:7-10), followed by the Great White Throne Judgment of all Wicked Dead (Rev. 20:11-15), followed by the Creation of New Heavens and Earth and the description of New Jerusalem descending out of heaven (Rev. 21:1-22:5).
2. **The Flow of the Book of Revelation.**
 - a. One would therefore expect that the Church would be the topic of Rev. 2-3. Christ delivers Seven Letters to Seven Churches in this section. Each Church is a specific local Church that existed in John’s day. But the message to each church includes a message for readers throughout the Church age: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Note the plural. So there is, I believe an appropriate application for the Church throughout the Church Age.
 - b. I believe Rev. 4-5, which depicts John’s being taken up to heaven is symbolic of the Church’s Rapture prior to the Tribulation. While John is there in heaven, God has a Seven-Sealed Scroll containing dire judgments. No one was worthy to break the Seven Seals. Only Jesus was because He had died to pay for man’s sins. But man as a whole had rejected His death, and now Jesus was going to unleash God’s wrath upon the earth.
 - c. I believe the Tribulation period is described with significant detail in Rev. 6-18. In broad, but picturesque terms, we witness Christ’s Breaking of Seven Seals of Judgment (Rev. 6:1-8:5); the Sounding of Seven Trumpets by Seven Angels (Rev. 8:6-11:19); and Seven Angels’ Pouring out Seven Bowls of the Wrath of God upon the Earth (Rev. 15-16).
3. **The Use of the Term *Ekklesia* (Church) in Revelation.** One of the most stunning evidences is found in the distribution of the Greek noun *ekklesia* (1577), usually translated “church,” in the Book of Revelation. It occurs 20 times. Fully 19 of those times it appears in chapters 1-3, **during** the Church Age. It DOES NOT APPEAR A SINGLE TIME during John’s discussion of the events of the Tribulation period! That is inconceivable if the church goes either all the way or only half of the way through the Tribulation! The word church (*ekklesia*) last appears in the

early chapters of Revelation in Rev. 3:22. It does not occur again until Rev. 22:16, long after the whole prophecy concerning the Tribulation has been completed! To me, that makes a Mid-Tribulation Rapture or a Post-Tribulation Rapture exceedingly unlikely, if not impossible.

4. **The Promise of Christ to the Church, Rev. 3:10.** “Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, 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.” Several comments are in order:
 - a. This message was delivered specifically to the Church of Philadelphia (Rev. 3:10). So the bulk of what is written applies to that Church in that day.
 - b. The promise of Preservation: Jesus will keep the Church of Philadelphia from the “hour of testing.” Undoubtedly He did preserve the Church of Philadelphia from an “hour of testing.”
 - c. The scope of Rev. 3:10 is more global, however. Jesus further described the “hour of testing” as “that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”
 - d. So this is not a localized “testing” (*peirasmós*, [3986](#)). It is about to come upon the whole world, the entire inhabited earth (*oikouménē*, [3625](#)).
 - e. The purpose of the testing: This testing is not coming to test the Church. It is coming to test (*peirázō*, [3985](#)) “those who dwell on the earth.” In the Book of Revelation this precise phrase is used in Rev. 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:14; 17:2, 8. ([See the link to this phrase.](#)) It amounts to a code phrase for unbelievers. Contrast, for comparison, the phrase, “those who dwell in heaven” (Rev. 13:6). So, we conclude that the Global Tribulation will not test the Church, but will test the unbelievers, the ones dwelling upon the earth.
 - f. The proper conclusion is that the Church will already have been taken to heaven (1 Thess. 4:13-18). The Church will be preserved out of this hour of testing because it is designed to test the “Earth-dwellers” – the unbelievers left upon the Earth after the Rapture. This makes a Mid-Tribulation Rapture and a Post-Tribulation Rapture impossible.

5. **The Call of John to Heaven, Rev. 4:1.** After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.”
 - a. The Book of Revelation is full of symbolic meaning. I believing this call of John up to heaven to show him what would take place “after these things” symbolizes the Rapture of the Church up to heaven prior to the events of the Tribulation period, which will be described in Revelation 6-18. This fits in

with the “inspired” outline of Revelation, given by Jesus to John in Rev. 1:19.

- b. In candor, few conservative Bible interpreters agree with me, but their protests have not convinced me.
 - c. Here is the truth. If the Rapture does not occur in Revelation 4:1, it occurs nowhere in the Book of Revelation. There is no evidence anywhere in this book for a Rapture anywhere in the Middle of the Tribulation. And there is no evidence for a Rapture at the end of Revelation when Jesus returns to earth to conquer the vast armies arrayed against Him (Rev. 19:11-21). And there is no discussion of people who have been transformed from living, mortal beings into resurrected beings without having had to die first (as recorded in 1 Thess. 4:13-18) in Rev. 20. In fact, those who came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years are specifically stated to have been beheaded (Rev. 20:4)!
 - d. Conclusion: Rev. 4:1 symbolizes the Rapture of the Church to Heaven as predicted in 1 Thess. 4:13-18.
- 6. The Presence of 24 Elders in Heaven before the Start of the Tribulation. Rev. 4:4, 10; 5:8**
- a. When John is called to heaven at the conclusion of the Church Age (Rev. 2-3), he is shown “what must take place after this” (Rev. 4:1 cf. Rev. 1:19). “What must take place after this” refers to the timeline of the rest of the Book of Revelation, which details events after the conclusion of the Church Age. The great bulk of the instruction which follows describes what happens in the 7-year period of the Tribulation (Rev. 6-18). If one wishes to be technical, it is the last half of this 7-year period that is called “The Great Tribulation” (cf. Matt. 24:21; Rev. 7:14). Nevertheless, in a general sense, we commonly call the entire 7-year period The Tribulation because it is the time when God’s program for the Church on earth has been completed and God is now working on Earth with the Nation of Israel (Dan. 9:24-27, especially Daniel 9:27).
 - b. The first thing John saw when he arrived in heaven was someone (presumably God Himself) seated on a throne (Rev. 4:2-3). Surrounding the throne were 24 elders seated on 24 thrones. They were clothed in white garments, and each was wearing a crown on his head (Rev. 4:4).
 - c. Whom do these elders represent? Throughout the OT, elders were the leaders of Israeli towns (Ruth 4:2) and leaders of the nation of Israel (Ex. 24:1-11). During the Church Age, elders are the leaders of churches (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).
 - d. It seems most logical to me that 12 of these elders in heaven represent the

Nation of Israel, and the other 12 represent the Church. Admittedly, this is not conclusive evidence, but it is evidence consistent with the fact that the Church is in heaven already. She is in the process of undergoing the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10-12), where she is being purified in order to be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean, being made ready for the Marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9). Meanwhile, on Earth, God is in the process of refining the Nation of Israel (Zech. 13:8-9; Mal. 3:1-6). At the same time He is also testing all the inhabitants of the entire world (Rev. 3:10).

“Debunking a Mid-Tribulation Rapture”

by James T. Bartsch

WordExplain.com

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