

**The Pre-Trib Rapture Defended:
God Has Not Appointed Us To Wrath**

By

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Introduction

The doctrine of the rapture of the church can be simply stated as follows. At some future time, the *genuine* believers in Jesus Christ (not merely people who have a church membership or affiliation) will be caught up to meet Him in the air when He descends from heaven.

Those Christians who are alive will be instantaneously changed from their mortal bodies into immortal bodies, from corruptible bodies to incorruptible bodies. Immediately before this happens, the believers who have died “in Christ” will be raised from the graves into their new bodies where they too will be with the Lord. This is the “blessed hope” of the true believers in Jesus.

The Pre-Tribulation Rapture Theory

In our previous book, *The Rapture*, we contended that the rapture would take place before the beginning of the final seven-year period before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This theory is known as the “Pre-Tribulation” rapture view. According to this position, believers will escape the unprecedented time of God’s wrath which will come upon the earth. These Christians will return with the Lord in triumph at the end of the seven-year period.

In this book, we will answer some of the most often-asked questions on the subject of the pre-trib rapture as well as respond to some of the most popular objections that arise.

A Closer Look At The Subtitle

The subtitle of this book says it all. For it, we cite the following verse:

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:9 NIV).

Since we believe the Scripture teaches that the final seven-year period will consist of the wrath of God being poured out on an unbelieving world, the believers in Christ will not be around to experience it. This is the salvation or deliverance which the Bible promises in this verse.

Where We Discover The Answers: The Scriptures Alone

It is imperative that we look to the Scripture, and the Scripture alone, to determine Bible doctrine. In fact, all Christian doctrine must be based solely upon Scripture. Indeed, it does not matter how old a doctrine is, from where it originated, how popular it may have been in the history of the church, or what some prominent theologian says or thinks. The only question that matters is this: Is it taught in the Bible?

Therefore, we will attempt to answer these questions by looking at what the totality of Scripture has to say on this subject.

With these thoughts in mind, let us now look at a defense of the Pre-trib rapture position . . .

Question 1

For The Pre-Trib Position To Be True, What Does It Need To Demonstrate From Passages That Clearly Speak Of The Rapture And Passages That Clearly Speak Of The Second Coming?

Since God cannot contradict Himself, we must have a theory of these “last days” events that takes everything into consideration and provides a reasonable explanation of what will take place.

In our previous book *The Rapture*, we looked at seven different views with respect to the rapture of the church while giving the strengths and weaknesses of each position. We came to the conclusion that the theory that best fits all the facts is the Pre-Tribulation view—that the true believers in Jesus Christ will be taken out of the world before the last seven-year period of “Great Tribulation” that will come upon the earth. This period is also known as “The Time of Jacob’s trouble” and “The Seventieth week of Daniel.”

We also showed that the implications of the Pre-Trib view are consistent with the totality of the biblical teaching on the subject of the coming of the Lord. In other words, it is the only theory that can make sense out of everything the Bible teaches about the rapture of the church, the Great Tribulation, and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Thus, we believe that the Bible teaches that the rapture of church and the Second Coming of Christ are two distinct events separated by seven years.

The Rapture And Second Coming Are Two Distinct Events

At the outset, we need to establish that the rapture of the church and the Second Coming of Christ are two distinct events. The Apostle Paul wrote:

Now regarding the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to be with him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to be easily shaken from your composure or disturbed by any kind of spirit or message or letter allegedly from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 NET).

The “arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ” and “our being gathered together unto him” are two different events. The rapture of the church, “our being gathered” is not the same thing as “the arrival”—the Second Coming of Christ. We should never confuse them.

Having said this, it is *possible* that they both could occur at the same. In other words, when the rapture of the church takes place, it could be at the same time that the Lord is returning to the earth to set up His kingdom.

Yet, it is also possible that there could be an interval of time between the rapture and the Second Coming. Therefore, while these two events could take place at the same time, they could also occur at different times, even years apart.

What Pretribulationism Must Demonstrate

Consequently, there is something that *must* be demonstrated if we are going to embrace the Pre-Trib view. It can be simply stated as follows.

There are passages in Scripture which unmistakably speak of the rapture and there are other passages that clearly speak of the Second Coming of Christ. For the Pre-Trib rapture to be true, it is essential to show that these

two events do not necessarily take place at the same time. In other words, there must be enough differences between these rapture passages and the Second Coming passages to believe that they are talking about two different events which could be separated by time.

However, if it can be proven from Scripture, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the rapture and the Second Coming take place at the same time, then the Pre-Trib position is refuted.

We mentioned this in our previous book when we presented the Post-Trib rapture position. This view assumes the rapture and Second Coming are two parts of one complex event. Basically, the argument is that Scripture teaches only one coming of Christ and that the rapture of the church, the resurrection of the dead, and the return of Christ all take place at the same time.

Consequently, for the Pre-Trib position to be true, it has to be shown that there are sufficient differences between the rapture and the Second Coming to indicate that possibly, even likely, that these two do not happen at the same time. In the matter of the Pre-Trib position, that time difference would be seven years.

We believe that this can be done from a study of Scripture. Therefore, before we move on to any questions about the rapture, we will examine this crucial issue concerning the differences between these two events. The evidence is as follows.

Difference 1: The Rapture Is Pictured As A Blessing, The Second Coming As A Judgment

When we examine the passages that speak of the rapture of the church (John 14:1-3, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-58) we discover that this coming of Jesus Christ is for the purpose of gathering the believers to Himself. In other words, it is a blessed event.

Conspicuous by its absence, is anything to do with judgment, or the punishment or unbelievers. Indeed, nowhere in any of these three rapture passages do we find one word about judgment. Nothing. It is always pictured as wonderful event for believers, unbelievers are *never* mentioned.

Contrast this to the passages which speak of our Lord's Second Coming. In *all* of the passages which speak of His coming to the earth, it is *always* in a context of judgment on the unbelieving world. For example, we read the following in the Book of Revelation which records the Second Coming of Christ:

Then I saw heaven opened and here came a white horse! The one riding it was called "Faithful" and "True," and with justice he judges and goes to war. His eyes are like a fiery flame and there are many diadem crowns on his head. He has a name written that no one knows except himself. He is dressed in clothing dipped in blood, and he is called the Word of God. The armies that are in heaven, dressed in white, clean, fine linen, were following him on white horses. From his mouth extends a sharp sword, so that with it he can strike the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod, and he stomps the winepress of the furious wrath of God, the All-Powerful. He has a name written on his clothing and on his thigh: "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Revelation 19:11-16 NET).

Here the armies of heaven are following the Lord as He comes to earth to punish those who have rejected Him. This is the time of judgment!

This is consistent with the promises of judgment we read about in the Old Testament. In fact, we find that the entire chapters of Zechariah 12 through 14 speak of the Lord judging His enemies upon His return to the earth. For example, we read:

And this shall be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their

tongues will rot in their mouths. And on that day a great panic from the Lord shall fall on them, so that each will seize the hand of another, and the hand of the one will be raised against the hand of the other (Zechariah 14:12-13 ESV).

Contrast these passages to the ones speaking about the rapture where only believers are mentioned, and where nothing is said whatsoever about judgment.

Now one may argue that in these rapture passages there *may be* God's judgment even though it is not mentioned. We acknowledge this.

But it is also likely that in this particular coming—the rapture—the Lord is not coming as the Judge. Putting it another way, the fact that no judgment is mentioned is perhaps because there is no judgment which takes place at that occasion.

In fact, this seems all the more likely when we consider that “every” passage dealing with Christ's Second Coming mentions some type of judgment—every single one!

On the other hand, in the clear rapture passages, judgment is *never* there. Consequently, it is certainly not illogical to assume the reason that judgment is not mentioned is because this is a time of reward and blessing which is *only* for the believers in Christ.

Difference 2: At The Second Coming Christ Sets Up His Kingdom, Nothing In The Rapture Passages Suggests This Happens Immediately

In addition, when we examine the passages dealing with the return of Christ to the earth it is *always* followed by the setting up of His one thousand-year millennial kingdom. First, we are told by Jesus that the angels gather the people:

And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matthew 24:31 ESV).

Then the nations are to be judged. Jesus said:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left (Matthew 25:31-33 ESV).

Thus, the Second Coming prepares for the immediate establishment of the Lord's earthly kingdom—the Millennium.

The prophet Joel wrote of the judgment that will take place when the Lord returns:

Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side. Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow—so great is their wickedness! Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel (Joel 3:12-16 NIV).

Again, as we look at the rapture passages, we find nothing in the slightest about Jesus immediately establishing His kingdom. In fact, we have only silence.

While it is theoretically possible that the kingdom of God would immediately follow the rapture of the church the silence may be due to the fact that the kingdom does not directly follow this event. Certainly, this is a logical inference from the facts.

Hence, the lack of mention of Christ immediately setting up His kingdom in these rapture passages is consistent with the idea that there is a lapse of time between the rapture and the Second Coming.

Difference 3: At The Rapture All Believers Are Given Glorified Bodies While Nothing Is Stated About This In Second Coming Passages

There is another difference. When we examine two passages referring to the rapture, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-58, we discover that those gathered to the Lord will receive glorified bodies at that time. Indeed, the living believers will have their bodies changed from immortal to mortal, from corruptible to incorruptible at the time the dead are raised, and their bodies are also changed.

In contrast, when we examine passages which clearly refer to the Second Coming, there is nothing stated about anyone, living or dead, receiving a glorified body.

Again, someone may argue, that at the Second Coming, the believing dead “in Christ” will be raised and the living believers will receive a glorified body.

While this is possible, there is nothing in Scripture that says this is what does happen. Consequently, it cannot merely be assumed to be true. In fact, it is also possible that this does not happen at the Second Coming, as the Pre-Trib position argues.

The Chronology

Between Matthew 24:31, the end of the Great Tribulation and the Second Coming of Christ, and 25:31, the judgment of the nations, Matthew records Jesus giving a number of parables which emphasize the need to be ready for His return.

However, there is no indication that there will be a long period of time between the events of Matthew 25:31 and Matthew 24:31. In other words, the chronology is that soon after the end of the Great Tribulation and the Second Coming of Christ, the “judgment of the Nations” occurs. In fact, the gathering Matthew 24:31 sets the stage for this particular judgment.

We contrast this with the gathering to the Lord that is mentioned in the rapture passages. In them, we discover nothing that is preparatory to the any judgment of believers and unbelievers—the sheep and the goats. In addition, there is nothing stated that the earthly kingdom of Christ is about to begin in any of these passages about the rapture.

We again emphasize that the lack of mention of any of these events in conjunction with the rapture of the church makes it at least possible that those events that take place at the Second Coming are not connected with the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the rapture of the church.

Therefore, it is not illogical or irrational to assume that the events recorded in Matthew 24:31, the Second Coming of Christ, and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, the rapture of the church, are speaking of two different events which will take place at two times in the future.

Again, we want to stress that Pre-trib rapture view merely needs to show that it is possible that the events connected with the rapture of the church—the resurrection of the dead and the catching up of believers—are so different than the events connected with the Second Coming of Christ—the “Judgment of the Nations” and the setting up of God’s Kingdom—that we could logically believe that Scripture is talking about two different events separated by a span of time.

In sum, based upon the comparison of these passages, no conclusive case can be made for the rapture to occur at the time of the Second Coming of Christ, the posttribulation rapture position.

Summary To Question 1:

For The Pre-Trib Position To Be True, What Does It Need To Demonstrate From Passages That Clearly Speak Of The Rapture And Passages That Clearly Speak Of The Second Coming?

While it is certainly possible to argue that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the rapture of the church are two events that take place at the same time, when we examine the totality of the evidence, we find that this it is not the only possible way that these “comings” of the Lord Jesus can be understood.

Indeed, since there are a number of differences between the two events, it is just as possible, if not even more likely, that the differences between the two comings is simply because they take place at different times.

Therefore, contrary to what is often claimed, the Pre-Tribulation rapture view is not refuted when we compare the clear passages that speak about the rapture of the church with those that speak about the Second Coming.

Question 2

Do The Parallel Statements Between Jesus And Paul Rule Out A Pre-Tribulation Rapture?

One argument that is often used against the Pre-Tribulation view has to do with parallels between statements of Jesus and the Apostle Paul with respect to the “end times.” In the Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24-25, Jesus spoke of His coming back to the world to set up His everlasting kingdom—the Second Coming of Christ.

When we compare His statements with those of the Apostle Paul in his letters to the Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, when he wrote about the rapture of the church, it is claimed that we will find that they are discussing the same event. The comparisons are as follows.

1. There Are Warnings About Deception Concerning The Time Of The End

To begin with, we discover that the words of Jesus and the words of Paul both contain warnings about certain deceptions which will occur in the future. We read what Jesus said about it:

Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many (Matthew 24:4-5 NIV).

There will be people who will be led astray by the lying words of these deceivers.

In the same manner, the Apostle Paul warned about end-time deception. He wrote to the Thessalonians with the following words of caution:

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 NIV).

From both Jesus and Paul, we find these warnings about people who will attempt to lead believers astray about end-time events.

2. There Will Be False Christs Who Will Appear With Signs And Wonders

Jesus and Paul also stress that there will be lying wonders at the time of the end. These wonders will be produced by false or counterfeit Messiahs. Jesus gave this warning:

For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many . . . and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people . . . For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect (Matthew 24:5,11,24 NIV).

Paul also wrote about one individual, a false Christ, or Messiah, who would produce counterfeit signs and wonders. These signs would fool the unbelievers:

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 NIV).

These false signs of the counterfeit Messiah, the final Antichrist, will lead many people astray.

3. There Will Be A Falling Away From The Faith

We also discover that there will be a continued falling away from the Christian faith before the time of the end. Jesus warned about this:

And because lawlessness will increase so much, the love of many will grow cold (Matthew 24:12 NET).

Paul also wrote about the apostasy or departure from the faith that would occur in the end times. He wrote to the Thessalonians:

Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not arrive until the rebellion comes and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction (2 Thessalonians 2:3 NET).

Thus, we find both Jesus and Paul speaking of a falling away from the faith at the time of the end.

4. The Final Antichrist Will Profane The Temple (The Abomination Of Desolation)

The final Antichrist, the man of sin, will profane the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. In the gospel of Matthew, we read the words of Jesus that explains what will happen:

So when you see the abomination of desolation—spoken about by Daniel the prophet—standing in the holy place (let the reader understand) (Matthew 24:15 NET).

We also find this taught by Paul. He wrote of the man of sin, the final Antichrist, as the person who desecrates the Holy Place. He said the following to the Thessalonians:

He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, and as a result he takes his seat in God's temple, displaying himself as God (2 Thessalonians 2:4 NET).

Again, we find this same event, the profaning of the Temple being predicted by both Jesus and Paul.

5. The Great Tribulation Occurs Before The Second Coming Of Christ

This period of great tribulation will occur *before* the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. Jesus made this clear when He said the following:

For then there will be great suffering unlike anything that has happened from the beginning of the world until now, or ever will happen. And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short (Matthew 24:21-22 NET).

According to Jesus, there is Great Tribulation first, then His return to the earth. Thus, the return of Jesus Christ happens *after* the great tribulation.

Paul taught the rapture of the church occurs when Christ comes again. He wrote the following to the Thessalonians:

For it is right for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to you who are being afflicted to give rest together with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels. With flaming fire he will mete out punishment on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will undergo the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from

the glory of his strength, when he comes to be glorified among his saints and admired on that day among all who have believed - and you did in fact believe our testimony (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 NET).

According to Jesus, His Second Coming occurs *after* the great tribulation period. It is clearly Post-Tribulational. The Apostle Paul, it is claimed, places the rapture of the church at the same time.

6. The Second Coming Of Christ In The Clouds Is Announced With A Trumpet Blast

When Christ comes again, He will come in the clouds. His coming will be announced with a blast of a trumpet. Jesus said:

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man arriving on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matthew 24:30-31 NET).

In Paul's description of the rapture of the church we also find a trumpet being mentioned. We read of this in First Thessalonians. It says:

For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:14-16 NIV).

Trumpets are prominent at the Second Coming of Christ and at the rapture of the church.

7. The Believers Are Gathered To Christ

Both Jesus and Paul taught that the believers will be gathered together to Christ. Jesus said:

Immediately after the distress of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shed its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. . . He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other (Matthew 24:29,31 CSB).

What is noteworthy here is that this gathering is *after* the tribulation!

Paul also wrote about this gathering to Christ.

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, he gave the following description of what will occur when Jesus Christ descends from heaven:

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:16 CSB).

To many people this is a clear indication that that rapture of the church, the gathering of believers, takes place *after* the Great Tribulation.

In Second Thessalonians, Paul again wrote of this gathering. He placed it at the same time as the coming of the Lord.

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him: We ask you, brothers and sisters (2 Thessalonians 2:1 CSB).

To sum up, these passages tell us that the gathering of believers to Christ occurs after the Great Tribulation.

8. The Return Of Christ Is Unexpected

Jesus' return will be unexpected. Indeed, Jesus Himself emphasized this. He said:

Now concerning that day and hour no one knows—neither the angels of heaven nor the Son—except the Father alone (Matthew 24:36 CSB).

In the same way, Paul encouraged the Thessalonian believers to live in a manner worthy of the coming of Christ. He said the following to the Thessalonians:

About the times and the seasons: Brothers and sisters, you do not need anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. When they say, "Peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the dark, for this day to surprise you like a thief (1 Thessalonians 5:1-4 CSB).

Christ will return when the people least expect it.

9. Because Of These Truths, Believers Need To Watch

The fact that the Lord has revealed these truths to us should cause us to be ready. We need to watch and wait. Jesus said:

Therefore be alert, since you don't know what day your Lord is coming (Matthew 24:42 CSB).

Paul said something similar to the believers; we are to watch. He wrote the following words to the Thessalonians:

So then, let us not sleep, like the rest, but let us stay awake and be self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled and put on the armor of faith and love, and a helmet of the hope of salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:6-8 CSB).

We are commanded to watch for these events by both Jesus and Paul. In doing so, we are to remain alert and clearheaded.

Conclusion:

With these parallels between Jesus' words in Matthew and the writings of the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians, it seems obvious to many people that Jesus and Paul are talking about the same event. Thus, Jesus' Second Coming includes the rapture of the church.

All of these things make it plain that the rapture of the church and the Second Coming of Christ should be viewed as one complex event rather than two events separated by a long interval of time.

The Pretribulation Response To This Claim

While there are those who believe that Scripture teaches the rapture and the Second Coming are part of one complex event that happens at the same time those who hold the Pre-Tribulational view of the rapture have the following responses to this claim.

1. There Is Only One Passage In Thessalonians To Compare

To begin with, it is only the passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 which should be compared with Jesus' words in Matthew about His Second Coming. The passage in 2 Thessalonians has no clear description of the rapture. In fact, it is speaking of the events of the Great Tribulation and the Second Coming of Christ. Therefore, it is wrong to use this passage as a comparison since we are uncertain which part may be referring to the rapture of the church.

2. The Parallels Are Not Decisive

Once we limit ourselves to comparing the one rapture passage in Thessalonians with Jesus' words about His Second Coming in Matthew 24-25, we find the parallels are not decisive in determining the time of the rapture or that they are speaking about the same event.

Indeed, the only things these passages have in common are a trumpet sound, and a gathering of the elect. This proves nothing since many biblical events contain these exact same elements. Furthermore, the fact that these distinct events have certain things in common should not surprise us.

This is A Different Gathering

Another important point is that we are looking at different gatherings. The gathering in First Thessalonians is to meet the Lord in the air and then return to the Father's House:

Do not let your hearts be distressed. You believe in God; believe also in me. There are many dwelling places in my Father's house. Otherwise, I would have told you, because I am going away to make ready a place for you. And if I go and make ready a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that where I am you may be too (John 14:1-3 NET).

In Matthew 24:31, the gathering prepares for the judgment of the sheep and goats—those who are living upon the earth at the end of the Great Tribulation period. This “Judgment of the Nations” must take place before the literal kingdom of God to come to the earth—the Millennium.

The Similarities Are Not Decisive

As we examine the parallel passages of the words of Jesus when He spoke of His Second Coming and the words of Paul concerning the rapture of the church the similarities are not decisive enough to assume that the rapture of the church takes place at the same time as the Second Coming. In other words, there is no clear evidence that each of them is speaking of the same event.

While some people may conclude the parallels are sufficient to make this conclusion this is not a necessary conclusion from the evidence.

So, we again stress, that when Jesus Christ returns to the earth there is no mention of any resurrection of the dead, nor of the glorifying of bodies of the living believers, the rapture. Consequently, it is *possible* that these two distinct events, the rapture and the Second Coming, do not happen at that time.

There Are Important Differences Between The Accounts

Not only are the similarities not conclusive, we also find that there are differences between the two accounts. In fact, these differences are greater than any similarities. They can be listed as follows.

1. There Is No Mention Of The Resurrection By Jesus

When Jesus speaks of returning to the earth at His Second Coming, nothing is said by Him about raising believers from the dead to meet Him in the air. Nothing at all.

However, the resurrection of the dead is Paul's main theme when he wrote about the rapture of the church and the events surrounding it. When writing to the Thessalonians, Paul emphasized that before the believers are caught up to meet the Lord, the dead "in Christ" are raised.

Consequently, they are talking about two different events.

2. There Is No Context Of Judgment From Paul

Furthermore, in Paul's description of the rapture of the church, there is nothing said about the judgment of anyone. It is a time when believers are gathered together into the presence of the Lord.

Yet when Jesus speaks of His return, as recorded in Matthew 24 we find that *judgment* is a main theme. The differences are clear.

These facts seem to indicate that two different events are in mind. While the two events could take place one after another this is not the necessary conclusion from the evidence at hand.

The Pre-Trib View Does Show The Dissimilarity

As we emphasized in the previous question, for the Pre-Trib view to be true, there must be enough dissimilarity between passages which clearly refer to the rapture of the church and passages which clearly discuss to the Second Coming of Christ to show Scripture is possibly, even likely, speaking about two distinct events which take place at two different times.

We believe when the passages are compared this is exactly what we find. Once this is established, then other issues need to be examined which shows that the Pre-Trib position is the only one that can adequately deal with everything Scripture says.

Summary To Question 2

Don't The Parallels Between The Statements Of Jesus And Paul Regarding The Second Coming Clearly Indicate A Post-tribulational Rapture? (Matthew 24-25, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12)

According to those who hold the post-tribulational rapture position there are important parallels between the words of Jesus in Matthew 24 and 25 and those of Paul in First Thessalonians 4:13-18 and Second Thessalonians 2:1-12. Both Jesus and Paul speak of the rapture of the church and the Second Coming of Christ. These parallels, it is argued, make it clear that the rapture and the Second Coming are the same event.

Indeed, in these parallel passages we find the following. There are warnings about coming deceptions, false signs and wonders, a warning about believers falling away, false Christs and a final antichrist, important events around the Temple, the Great Tribulation, the coming of Jesus Christ on clouds, trumpet sounds, and angels accompanying the Lord when He comes in power.

The parallel passages also speak of Christ gathering the believers unto Himself, that this return is unexpected. Thus, people are exhorted to watch for these signs that speak of the coming of Christ. All of these parallels cannot be considered a coincidence. These passages describe one event—the Second Coming of Christ to the earth. Thus, there is no reason to make the rapture of the church as something separated in time from the Second Coming of Christ.

While this list of parallels seems at first glance to be impressive, this does not solve the question as to the timing of the rapture. For one thing, there is only one passage in Thessalonians which should be compared to Jesus' statements in Matthew 24-25—1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. The passage in 2 Thessalonians does not describe the rapture so it should not be used to argue the two events happen at the same time.

When we compare Jesus' words to those of Paul in 1 Thessalonians, we do not find clear parallels. In fact, when one looks more closely at the accounts, we find the differences greater than the things in common.

Furthermore, the things these passages have in common are not unique. There are a number of passages in Scripture which contain the same elements which we have here but are speaking of entirely different events. Indeed, when a heavenly event occurs, we should expect such things as trumpets blowing, the Lord appearing in clouds, and loud sounds coming from heaven.

Add to this the differences between the two accounts. In Matthew 24-25, Jesus mentions no resurrection of believers when He comes again while Paul makes this a central point in His description of the rapture of the church.

In Jesus' description of the end, judgment is emphasized. In the rapture passage of Paul, judgment of unbelievers is not mentioned.

Thus, the differences are so pronounced that we believe that the best conclusion is to see two distinct events—the rapture and the church and the Second Coming of Christ rather than one complex event. While these two events may take place at the same time this is not necessarily the conclusion one must come to when examining the evidence.

In response, those who believe in a post-trib rapture argue that the gathering of the elect in Matthew 24:31 is a reference to the rapture. Therefore, the rapture is mentioned by Jesus in this verse.

While possible, this is merely an assumption, it is not proof. Furthermore, it does not alter the facts that we have already noted—there is no mention of signs, judgment, or the kingdom in the rapture passages and that there is no mention of the resurrection of believers, or the changing of the bodies of those who are alive in Jesus' teaching recorded in this passage in Matthew.

Consequently, the comparison of Paul's words to the Thessalonians, with Jesus' teachings on the Mount of Olives, do not conclusively prove that the rapture of the church takes place at the same time as His Second Coming to the earth.

Question 3

Does Second Thessalonians Chapter One Provide Clear Evidence For A Post-tribulation Rapture?

Of all the arguments which are raised for a Post-Tribulation rapture one of the strongest seems to come from the first chapter of Second Thessalonians. Indeed, many people who hold the Post-Tribulation view believe that this particular section rules out any possibility of a Pre-Tribulation rapture. The verses in question read as follows:

It is clear evidence of God's righteous judgment that you will be counted worthy of God's kingdom, for which you also are suffering, since it is just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you and to give relief to you who are afflicted, along with us. This will take place at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his powerful angels, when he takes vengeance with flaming fire on those who don't know God and on those who don't obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the Lord's presence and from his glorious strength on that day when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at by all those who have believed, because our testimony among you was believed. (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 CSB).

This passage supposedly provides the indisputable evidence for the Post-Tribulation rapture. We can make the following observations.

The Post-Tribulation Argument From Second Thessalonians Chapter 1

From the first chapter of Second Thessalonians, the Post-Tribulation argument can be summed up by the following five points.

1. The Thessalonians Will Receive Relief At The Revelation Of Christ

To begin with, we find that the church at Thessalonica, a persecuted church, will receive *relief* at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote:

Since it is just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you and to give relief to you who are afflicted, along with us. This will take place at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his powerful angels (2 Thessalonians 1:6-7 CSB).

Relief will come to them when Jesus Christ is revealed. There is no doubt about this.

2. This Relief Is From The Trouble They Were Presently Enduring

The promised relief these Christians will receive was to be from the present troubles they were experiencing for the sake of Jesus Christ and His gospel. They were being persecuted for their faith in Christ. In addition, we are told that these believers would receive relief from those persecutors who were afflicting them. Thus, they will be relieved from the troubles as well as the troulbers.

3. Their Relief From Suffering Will Occur At The Rapture

The relief will come for these believers when the Lord Jesus takes them to Himself at the rapture of the church. This is clearly what Paul meant in this passage. He wrote about this in his previous letter to them where he stated the following:

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For we say this to you by a word from the Lord: We who are still alive at the Lord's coming will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are still alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 CSB).

The Thessalonians were aware that relief would eventually come to them. This would take place when they would be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

4. The Time Of The Relief Is When Jesus Christ Is Visibly Revealed (The Second Coming)

Furthermore, the *time* of this relief is specifically stated in this context; the Second Coming of Christ to the earth. Thus, there is no doubt about what this refers to. Everyone agrees that the coming of Christ with His angels is a reference to the Second Coming.

5. The Second Coming Brings Relief For Believers And Judgment For Unbelievers

When Jesus Christ comes again, there will be a combination of judgment and reward. Paul wrote the following to the Thessalonians:

They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the Lord's presence and from his glorious strength on that day when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at by all those who have believed, because our testimony among you was believed (2 Thessalonians 1:9-10 CSB).

Thus, the Second Coming is a time of judgment for unbelievers but reward for those who have trusted Christ. Consequently, those who are presently suffering for Christ will be vindicated and those who have persecuted them will be judged.

Conclusion: The Rapture And The Second Coming Are The Same Event

From the above evidence, it seems clear that the two events, the relief from suffering which is the rapture of the church, and the revelation of Jesus Christ, which is His Second Coming to the earth, are basically the same event. The Thessalonians will receive relief from their suffering, the rapture, when Christ comes visibly to the earth, the Second Coming. He will remove them from the earth as He is descending from heaven. They will meet Jesus on His way down and then join Him as He destroys His enemies. This includes those who were troubling the Thessalonians.

Thus, it is argued, that we have incontrovertible proof that the rapture and the Second Coming are not two distinct events separated by an interval of time but are actually two events which occur at basically the same time. Some see this passage as the "smoking gun" that refutes the Pre-Tribulation rapture.

The Pre-Tribulation Response

Those who hold the Pre-Tribulation rapture position do not believe that Second Thessalonians chapter one accomplishes what the Post-Tribulation advocates believe that it accomplishes.

There are at least three different ways in which they respond to the conclusion of those holding the Post-Tribulation view.

1. The Revelation Refers To All The Events Surrounding The Lord's Coming

There is the opinion that the Greek term *apokalypsis*, translated “revelation” in this passage, is a reference to all of the events related to the return of Christ to the earth. This would include the rapture, the Great Tribulation, as well as the Second Coming.

Thus, Paul is not attempting to give any specific chronology in this verse as to the timing of the coming events. He dealt with the chronology in First Thessalonians where he taught the rapture comes first, then the great tribulation followed by the Second Coming of Christ.

2. The Rapture Is In View

The idea of some people is that it is *only* the rapture of the church, and not the Second Coming, which is the subject of this passage. The rest, or relief, that the rapture brings is what Paul stresses. The Second Coming is not in view.

3. The Rapture Is Not The Relief Which Paul Wrote About

The best answer to this question may be the simplest—this passage is not talking about the rapture at all. The relief Paul is speaking about occurs when Christ returns and sets up His kingdom. At that time, the believers will be separated from the unbelievers, the sheep from the goats.

There is evidence that this is what the apostle had in mind. For one thing, the relief is not merely from the persecution that the Thessalonians were experiencing. The relief is for *all* Christians.

Furthermore, the rest, or relief, Paul speaks about it is not the rapture of the church but rather consists of the blessings the Lord brings at His Second Coming. The relief that would be brought was not merely relief from persecution since Paul said that *all* believers would experience this relief.

The Second Coming of Christ not only brings cessation of persecution it also brings much more to the believer—the blessings of the kingdom of God. This includes a glorified body and heavenly rewards.

In addition, there is the inclusion of the judgment of the wicked in this relief. This being the case, the relief which Paul speaks about does *not* take place at the rapture of the church but rather when Christ comes again since there is no judgment associated with the rapture.

Thus, this passage can be harmonized with the Pre-Tribulation view and is not, as some have supposed, incontrovertible evidence that the rapture and Second Coming are two parts of one complex event.

Conclusion: This Does Not Solve The Rapture Question

Therefore, this passage in Second Thessalonians does not provide the conclusive evidence that the rapture of the church happens at the same time as the Second Coming of Christ.

Summary To Question 3

Does Second Thessalonians Chapter One Provide Clear Evidence For A Post-tribulation Rapture?

Post-tribulationism advocates give a number of reasons as to why they believe the rapture of the church will occur at the same time as the Second Coming of Christ. One of the arguments they put forward as refuting the Pre-tribulation rapture theory, as well as establishing the post-tribulation position, comes from the first chapter of Second Thessalonians.

In this chapter Paul speaks of Christ returning in judgment of those which were persecuting the Thessalonians. This return grants them relief. This, it is argued, shows the rapture of the church occurs at the same time Christ returns since the relief they receive occurs at the return of Christ.

Consequently, it is contended that it is impossible to harmonize the pre-tribulation view with this passage. Indeed, the only rapture position that fits with this passage is the post-tribulation theory.

Those who hold the pre-tribulation position do not see this passage as refuting their theory or establishing a post-tribulation rapture. There are a number of different lines of reasoning that are used in response.

One way to tackle this problem is to understand the entire passage as speaking of the rapture and not the Second Coming. What is in view is the rapture of the church as well as events leading up to the Second Coming of Christ. The rapture begins the events which culminate in the judgment the Lord brings at His Second Coming.

Also, we find some who hold the Pre-tribulation view arguing that the Greek term *apokalupsis*, translated revelation in this passage, is a broad concept which includes the rapture, the Great Tribulation, and the Second Coming. Therefore, Paul is using a term which encompasses all of the end-times events from the rapture until the judgment of the wicked at the Second Coming.

Probably the best argument on the side of Pre-tribulationism is to reject the idea that this passage speaks of the rapture at all. It is contended that the rest or relief that Paul speaks about is not the rapture of the church but rather consists of the blessings the Lord brings at His Second Coming. The relief that would be brought was not merely relief from persecution since Paul said that *all* believers would experience this relief. The Second Coming of Jesus Christ not only brings cessation of persecution to believers it also brings much more; the blessings of the kingdom of God. This includes a glorified body and heavenly rewards.

Furthermore, there is the inclusion of the judgment of the wicked in this relief. No longer will any believer have to suffer at the hands of an unbeliever. Since there is never judgment associated with the rapture of the church, the relief which Paul speaks about does not take place at that time; it occurs when Christ comes again.

Thus, this passage can be harmonized with the Pre-tribulation rapture view and is not undisputable evidence that the rapture and Second Coming are two parts of one complex event that takes place at the same time.

Whatever the case may be, this passage does not settle the issue with respect to the timing of the rapture of the church.

Question 4

If The Church Participates In The First Resurrection, Does This Mean The Rapture Is Post-Tribulational? (Revelation 20:4-6)

In the twentieth chapter of the Book of Revelation there is a passage about those who will be raised from the dead. They take part in “the first resurrection.” John wrote about it as follows:

Then I saw thrones, and people seated on them who were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and who had not accepted the mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed.

This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6 CSB).

It is argued that this passage gives decisive evidence of a Post-Tribulation rapture. The following points are put forward to support this position.

The Great Tribulation Has Been Completed, Christ Has Returned

For one thing, everyone admits that this first resurrection occurs *after* the Great Tribulation is over and Jesus Christ has returned to earth. Of this, there is no doubt. It is also argued that the church participates in this Post-Tribulation resurrection. The argument is stated in this manner.

The Dead Are Raised Before The Living Believers Are Raptured

To begin with, at the rapture we are told that the dead believers in Christ are resurrected *before* the living believers are changed into glorified bodies. Paul wrote the following:

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel’s voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are still alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 CSB).

Since according to the Book of Revelation this first resurrection occurs *after* the tribulation is over then, of necessity, the rapture must take place at the end of the tribulation period, not before.

To many people, this is one of the strongest biblical argument for a Post-Tribulational rapture of the church.

The Pretribulational Response

There is no doubt that the reference to the first resurrection in Revelation 20:5-6 refers to a resurrection at the end of the Great Tribulation. Jesus Christ has already returned to the earth. Thus, it is post-tribulational. This is not in question.

Furthermore, it is a *bodily* resurrection, not a spiritual resurrection, as some have claimed. Indeed, their actual bodies of believers are raised from the dead.

These Are Tribulation Saints

Pre-Tribulationists, however, do not believe that this passage refers to the believers who are raised at the rapture of the church. Instead it refers to the resurrection of a specific group—those who have believed in Jesus Christ *after* the church was raptured. In other words, it is the “tribulation saints.”

This resurrection of the tribulation saints will occur some seven years *after* the church has been caught up in the air to meet the Lord. Indeed, it is clear that these people who are raised at this time have believed in Jesus Christ *during* the seventieth week of Daniel—the final seven-year period before Christ returns.

Understanding The First Resurrection

The fact that it is called the “first resurrection” does not mean these are the only people involved in this first resurrection, or they are the first to be raised. The phrase “first resurrection” is contrasted to the “second death.”

The second death is the time when all unbelievers will be raised and eternally separated from the Lord. The first resurrection is a series of resurrections for “believers only.”

The First Resurrection Is In Stages

We find that the Scripture explicitly says that the first resurrection is in stages. Jesus Christ was the first to be raised and then others will come after Him. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward, at his coming, those who belong to Christ (1 Corinthians 15:22, 23 CSB).

It is clear that not everyone came back from the dead at the time of Jesus’ resurrection. Therefore, the resurrection of these martyrs, which is recorded in Revelation 20, cannot be the “first” in an absolute sense.

So, we are dealing with a sequence here. The question, of course, is how many sequences do we have? We know we have at least “two.”

After Jesus’ resurrection, we find that the dead “in Christ” are to be raised next. Paul wrote:

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel’s voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:16 CSB).

Thus, we have Jesus’ resurrection occurring first. Next, it is the “dead in Christ,” the Christians, who are raised from the dead.

Two Groups Are Raised At Christ’s Coming

When Jesus Christ returns to the earth, we find our next sequence of resurrections. At that time, the tribulation saints are raised along with the Old Testament believers. Each of these groups will also take part in the first resurrection.

The Raising Of The Tribulation Saints

At their resurrection, we note that the tribulation saints, those who were martyred for Jesus during the Great Tribulation, are distinguished from those “sitting upon the thrones.” The Bible says:

Then I saw thrones, and people seated on them who were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and who had not accepted the mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed (Revelation 20:4,5 CSB).

Those sitting on the thrones are members of the New Testament church, the Christians. They have *already* been raised from the dead at the time those who were martyred for Jesus, the tribulation saints, are raised.

Thus, we have the distinction between those sitting on the thrones, the church, and those raised *after* Jesus Christ returns, the tribulation saints. They are two different groups of believers.

The Old Testament Believers Are Also Raised

The Book of Daniel explains what will happen to the Old Testament saints:

Many who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to eternal life, and some to disgrace and eternal contempt (Daniel 12:2 CSB).

These believers will be also raised at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Thus, while there will be a resurrection of all of the dead believers from the very beginning of when people lived upon the earth, we discover that not everyone will be raised at once.

Consequently, the fact that the church, the New Testament Christians, participate in the first resurrection is not a decisive factor in determining the time of the rapture. Other factors must decide this question.

Thus, while those who hold the Post-Tribulation view see Revelation 20:4-6 as the bodily resurrection of *all* of the righteous people from all time, those who hold the Pre-Tribulation view see this as referring to a specific group—those who were martyred for Jesus Christ during the Great Tribulation. Though not stated in this particular passage, we know that the Old Testament saints will also be raised at that time.

There Is A Problem For Those Who Claim All Believers Will Be Raised At The Rapture

Something else should be noted about the timing of the resurrection of believers at the rapture and those raised from the dead at the Second Coming of Christ.

At the rapture, the dead in Christ are raised while Jesus is *descending* from heaven toward the earth. Paul writes:

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:16 CSB)

The Bible is specific. These dead believers are raised while Christ is still in the air on His descent from heaven.

However, according to Revelation 19-20, at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, we find Him descending to the earth, killing His enemies at the Battle of Armageddon, and then hurling the final Antichrist and the False Prophet into the lake of fire.

Next, the Lord then binds Satan and then throws him into the abyss, the bottomless pit. It is only *after* these events transpire that the righteous dead are then raised.

So, we have a difference in timing between the resurrection of the dead “in Christ” which takes place at the rapture and those who are raised *after* Jesus returns to the earth and judges His enemies. The logical conclusion seems to be that these resurrections take place at different times.

Conclusion

To sum up, after Jesus’ resurrection, the next to be raised are those at the rapture of the church. These are the New Testament Christians—the dead “in Christ.” At the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, some seven years later, the tribulation saints and the Old Testament saints are raised from the dead.

Therefore, we find that Scripture makes it clear that the righteous dead will *not* all be raised at the same time.

Summary To Question 4

If The Church Participates In The First Resurrection, Does This Not Mean The Rapture Is Post-tribulation? (Revelation 20:4-6)

Revelation chapter twenty speaks of the “first resurrection.” Everyone agrees that this particular reference takes place after the Great Tribulation and the Second Coming of Christ. Thus, it is “post-tribulation.”

We also find that when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he said that the dead “in Christ” will rise first, then the living believers will be raptured or caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Thus, the resurrection of believers takes place before the time of the rapture of the church.

To many people this is evidence that the rapture of the church has to occur after the tribulation since the raising of the saints is clearly said to take place immediately before the believers are caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

There is no doubt that the reference to the first resurrection in Revelation 20:5-6 refers to a resurrection at the end of the tribulation when Christ comes again. Thus, it is post-tribulation.

Pre-tribulationists, however, do not believe that this refers to the all believers being raised at the same time at the rapture of the church.

Instead it refers to the resurrection of those who have believed in Christ *after* the church was raptured. In other words, the tribulation saints. This post-tribulation resurrection consists of those who are martyred for Christ during the Great Tribulation period. The Old Testament saints are also raised at this time.

This fits well with what the Apostle Paul wrote. He said the resurrection of the dead will be in stages. Jesus Christ is the first. Next are those who belong to Him when He comes for His church at the rapture. After this, He will raise those who have believed in Him during the Great Tribulation period, the tribulation saints and He will also raise the Old Testament saints at this time.

Therefore, there is no equating the first resurrection of Revelation 20 with the rapture of the church and the resurrection of believers which occurs with it. It is not speaking of that particular event.

Question 5

Since The Church Is Raptured At The Last Trumpet Does This Mean A Post-Tribulational Rapture?

There is another popular objection to the Pre-trib rapture that we must deal with—the blowing of the trumpet at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The issue can be simply stated as follows.

The Trumpet Blows After The Great Tribulation

First, Matthew 24:31 clearly speaks of Christ coming to earth *after* the Great Tribulation, and it speaks of a trumpet blowing when the “elect” are gathered:

He will send out his angels with a loud trumpet, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other (Matthew 24:31 CSB).

Paul stated that when the Lord Jesus descends from heaven, a trumpet will blow and then He will immediately gather the living as well as the dead believers “in Christ:”

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel’s voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are still alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 CSB).

In another place, Paul actually calls this the “last trumpet:”

Listen, I am telling you a mystery: We will not all fall asleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet (1 Corinthians 15:51 CSB)

The Seventh Trumpet In Revelation

Some also equate it with the seventh trumpet in the Book of Revelation. In fact, when this trumpet sounds, we have the following declaration:

The seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever (Revelation 11:15 CSB).

It is contended that when we put these passages together it proves beyond any doubt that the rapture will take place at the time of the return of Christ to the earth—the Second Coming.

The sequence is as follows: The Lord descends from heaven with a trumpet blast—the seventh trumpet of the Book of Revelation. He raises the dead believers at this time and then immediately the living believers are caught up to meet Him in the air on His way back to the earth. We are specifically told that the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of the Lord.

Therefore, at His Second Coming, the rapture of the church and the resurrection of the dead each take place.

Therefore, it is claimed that the Pre-Trib rapture position is clearly refuted by comparing these passages about the last trumpet.

The Pre-Trib Response

Those who hold to the pre-trib perspective equate the trumpets in 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians, they both refer to the rapture of the church. However, they do not equate them with either the trumpet immediately before the return of Christ or the seventh trumpet in the Book of Revelation. There are a number of reasons as to why this is so.

Revelation Was Written After Paul Had Died

To begin with, Paul could not have been referring to the seventh trumpet in the Book of Revelation because it had not been written at the time that he wrote the letter to the Corinthians! In fact, Revelation was written after Paul had died.

Consequently, his audience in Corinth would not have equated the last trumpet with the seventh trumpet in Revelation since Revelation would not be written for another thirty years.

Furthermore, each of the trumpets in Revelation issue judgments that are going to come upon the earth. For example, a great earthquake follows the seventh trumpet:

Then the temple of God in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant appeared in his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder, an earthquake, and severe hail (Revelation 11:19 CSB).

In contrast to this, the trumpet at the rapture is one of blessing. In fact, there is nothing about judgment in the two clear rapture passages, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and First Corinthians 15:51-58.

The Chronology Of Revelation Is Against This

There are good arguments that can be made for a chronological view of the various judgments recorded in the Book of Revelation, first the seals, then trumpets, and finally the bowl judgments. If so, then the trumpet judgments are not the last series of judgments to take place upon the earth. That would be the “bowl” judgments.

Consequently, the trumpet judgments would not be signaling the immediate coming of Christ to the earth neither would they occur at the very end of this last seven-year period.

Therefore, the trumpet that blows immediately before Christ’s return, as recorded in Matthew 24:31, *follows* the trumpet judgments in the Book of Revelation.

There Is No Resurrection Of The Dead In These Trumpet Calls

In addition, the trumpet calls recorded in Matthew 24:31 and Revelation 11:15 do not include any explicit description of the resurrection of the dead or the transformation of the bodies of the living.

Why Did Paul Call It Last?

However, it is called the “last” trumpet.” Does that not indicate that there are no trumpets that will blow after this one?

For those who hold the pre-trib point of view there are several possible explanations as to why Paul said it was the “last trump” in 1 Corinthians 15:52. They can be summed up as follows:

It May Be Last In A Sequence

One possible explanation is that the “last trumpet” in 1 Corinthians 15:52 may refer to the last trumpet in a sequence but not the last trumpet in time. In fact, Paul may be using word “last” in contrast to “first.” He did this a few verses earlier when he contrasted the “first” man, Adam, and the “last” man or “second man,” Christ:

So also it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living person”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, made of dust; the second man is from heaven (1 Corinthians 15:45-47 NET)

The first trumpet blast that is recorded in the Bible was used to assemble the nation of Israel when they met with the Lord on Mount Sinai. It was at that time the nation received the Law of Moses, which, the Bible says, among other things, began the ministry of death (see Exodus 19:10-20, 2 Corinthians 3:7-9 and Hebrews 12:18-21).

Therefore, the last trumpet, that we find in 1 Corinthians, will call the church to assemble together to meet the Lord in the air. This will include two major events; first, the resurrection of the dead in Christ and then the catching up of believers; the rapture of the church. These two events will signal the end of death for those who have trusted the Lord.

If this is how the reference is to be understood, then this last trumpet for the church would be in contrast to the first trumpet at Mt. Sinai. In other words, the ministry of death is now contrasted to Christ’s victory over death.

Trumpets Were Used As A Call To War

Trumpets were also used as a call to war. We read the following the Old Testament:

If you go to war in your land against an adversary who opposes you, then you must sound an alarm with the trumpets, and you will be remembered before the Lord your God, and you will be saved from your enemies (Numbers 10:9 NET).

In this instance, it was a call to war. Paul wrote something similar to the Corinthians:

If, for example, the trumpet makes an unclear sound, who will get ready for battle? (1 Corinthians 14:8 NET).

A trumpet was also used to call the army to a halt the battle:

Then Joab blew the trumpet and the army turned back from chasing Israel, for Joab had called for the army to halt. . . . Then the woman went to all the people with her wise advice and they cut off Sheba’s head and threw it out to Joab. Joab blew the trumpet, and his men dispersed from the city, each going to his own home. Joab returned to the king in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 18:16; 20:22 NET).

In sum, the first trumpet gathered the troops for battle while the last trumpet called the troops home from the battle.

The Spiritual Battle Will Be Over

If this view of the “last trumpet” is what Paul had in mind, then the trumpet for the rapture would indicate that the spiritual battle that the believers in Christ have been fighting will now be over. In other words, they are returning home from the battle.

Hence, as their earthly work is complete, this last trumpet will call them to their heavenly home: Paul wrote to the Philippians:

But our citizenship is in heaven - and we also await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform these humble bodies of ours into the likeness of his glorious body by means of that power by which he is able to subject all things to himself (Philippians 3:20 NET).

The Use Of Trumpets In The First Century

The Roman army also used trumpets to signal the beginning as well as the ending of a guard's watch. If this is the illustration that Paul had in mind, then the "last trumpet" will signal the end of the church's watch on the world.

Conclusion: Multiple Trumpets Can Mean Different Events At Different Times

After examining these examples of the uses of the trumpet blast from Scripture, as well as from first century Roman practice, there seems to be an obvious conclusion—multiple trumpet blasts at the time of the end does not necessarily mean the same event is always in view.

Therefore, it must be *proven*, not merely assumed, that when Jesus and Paul are speaking of the blowing of the shofar, the trumpet, they are referring to *same* trumpet blast. An examination of the totality of the evidence reveals that they are not.

The Differences Between The Events

We should also recall some facts that we have previously noted. Nowhere, in these two passages which mention the blowing of the trumpet, Matthew 24:31 or Revelation 11:15, do not find any mention of the resurrection of the bodies of the dead believers at the Second Coming of Christ, or the living believers being caught up to meet the Lord in the air and receiving their new bodies—the rapture of the church.

In sum, the fact that we find a trumpet blowing in each passage does not mean that they are describing the same event. Indeed, we find that the seven different trumpet blasts that are recorded in the Book of Revelation, including the last one, are only announcing punishment upon the unbelievers living in this world! There is no message of hope, or encouragement in any of them.

Which Believers Are Gathered?

While it is certainly true that trumpets are used in Matthew 24:31, as well as in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, when speaking about the future gathering of believers, the question must be answered is this: which believers are gathered?

Context, Context, Context

When the context is examined, we will discover that two different groups of believers are in view.

In First Thessalonians 4:13-18, it is the "dead in Christ." This is a technical term which refers to the New Testament believers; those who have placed their faith in Christ from the time of the birth of the church, at the Day of Pentecost, until the coming of the Lord for His church, the rapture.

In Matthew 24:31, the context is completely different. Jesus is discussing believers who have survived the Great Tribulation.

There are two things that we must emphasize from these passages.

First, the fact that each group is gathered at a trumpet blast does not make them the same group.

Second, the trumpet blasts do not prove that the two events, the rapture of the church and the Second Coming of Christ, happen at the same time.

Indeed, we have already noted a number of differences between the two events that make it possible, if not likely, that we are looking at things that do not happen at the same time.

Summary To Question 5:

Since the Church is Raptured at the Last Trumpet Does This Mean a Post-Tribulational Rapture?

A popular argument that is used to equate the rapture with the Second Coming of Christ is found in a comparison of passages referring to trumpets blowing at the time of the end. In fact, many assume that the last trumpet mentioned in First Corinthians, is the same trumpet found in the Book of Revelation, the seventh trumpet, as well as the trumpet blown at the return of Christ. However, this is certainly not the case.

For one thing, Paul couldn't be equating the last trumpet to the seventh trumpet in Revelation because the revelation had not been given yet! Indeed, John received it some thirty or so years after First Corinthians was written.

Question 7

Does Paul Use A Technical Greek Term In Describing The Rapture Which Makes Clear It Is Post-Tribulational?

One of the arguments often cited for a Post-Tribulation rapture concerns a particular word the Bible uses to describe the coming of the Lord. We find it in the main passage which deals with the rapture of church. It reads:

After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet [*apantasis*] the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:17 NIV).

The word translated “meet” is the Greek word *apantasis*. It is said to be a technical term which describes an ancient civic custom. It refers to an official public welcome to a city when an important visitor or dignitary was arriving. The idea is that an official delegation from the city would go out to meet that dignitary and then escort him back into the city.

Paul, it is argued, used this specific term to indicate what would happen at the rapture of the church. An official delegation, the believers, rise from the dead, or are caught up into heaven, where they would meet the Lord in the air while He is on His way to the earth. When they meet up with Jesus, they then escort Him to the earth. Thus, it is claimed that this is a clear illustration of a Post-Tribulation rapture.

The Case For Apantasis Being A Technical Term

There are a number of reasons given as to why this Greek term has this implicit technical meaning. There are two, or possibly three, other times this word is used as a noun in the New Testament. We say, “two or three” because in one of the verses, Matthew 25:1, there is a question as to how the original Greek text initially read. For completeness sake we will list it also:

At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet [*apantasis*] the bridegroom (Matthew 25:1).

We find Jesus using this term *apantasis* later in the parable of the ten virgins, or ten bridesmaids. He said the following:

At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet [*apantasis*] him!’ (Matthew 25:6 NIV).

The last use of the term is found in the Book of Acts:

The brothers and sisters there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet [*apantasis*] us. At the sight of these people Paul thanked God and was encouraged. (Acts 28:15 NIV).

It is argued that in each of these instances, we see the technical meaning of the term. The delegation went out to greet the important person and then escort him back to where these greeters originally came from.

Thus, each time the word is used in the New Testament, it has this distinct meaning. It *always* refers to going out and meeting a person and then returning with the person who was met. Consequently, this means that the ones who are caught up to meet the Lord in the rapture of the church immediately escort Him back to earth. This is a Post-Tribulation rapture.

The Case Against This Being A Technical Term

While this argument is widely used it is without merit. Indeed, there are a number of reasons as to why it should not be used to assert a Post-Tribulation rapture. They are as follows.

1. It Is Not A Technical Term

To begin with, this is not a technical term. Indeed, there are no specific connotations in this word which demand we understand its meaning in a technical sense. There is *no* sense where the word must mean that the people who went out to meet the dignitary immediately returned with him to the place from where they came out.

In fact, the verb form of the word has the idea of meeting *within* a city. We find it used in two of the gospels. We read the following in Mark:

So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet [*apantasis*] you. Follow him” (Mark 14:13 NIV).

Here the meeting was within the city. The man who met the disciples did not return with them.

In Luke, we have another instance of the verb used of a meeting within a city:

As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met [*apantasis*] him. They stood at a distance (Luke 17:12 NIV).

Jesus met these lepers within a city, not from the outside coming in.

In these instances, the meeting is within a city with no idea of bringing a visiting dignitary back. There is no technical usage here.

2. It Is Not Certain The Noun Form Of The Word Is Always Used In A Technical Sense

We have seen that the verb form of the word does not have the technical meaning of a delegation meeting a visiting dignitary and then accompanying him back to the city.

The same can be said about the noun form of the word; the form used in First Thessalonians 4:17. In the instances in which the noun form is used, it is not clear that this word is always used in the supposed technical sense of greeters meeting a dignitary and then accompanying him back to their place of origin.

In only two of the four instances where the noun form is used in the New Testament can this meaning of the term be applied. The other two instances, First Thessalonians 4:17 and Matthew 25:1, are unclear.

3. Is The Destination Earth Or Heaven?

The word in either its verb or noun form does indeed mean “to meet someone.” However, the idea of escorting the person back to the original place of those greeting the person is not contained in the meaning of the term. Those who hold the Post-Tribulation view believe the church escorts Jesus back to the earth after meeting Him in the air.

However, those who hold other views of the rapture of the church see Jesus bringing the believers with Him back to heaven. Therefore, the issue is the *destination* to where these believers are brought, heaven or earth? The word itself does not answer this question as to the destination they are traveling.

While Paul in First Thessalonians does not tell us the direction where the believers go after they meet the Lord in the sky, Jesus does. In John 14:1–3, Christ tells us that He will take believers back with Him to the *Father's house*. His words are as follows:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:1-3 NIV).

It is only after the seven-year tribulation period, the seventieth week of Daniel, that Jesus Christ, the New Testament church and the elect angels return to the earth.

However, this appearance will certainly not be as a dignitary to be warmly welcomed by the world! Instead, Jesus returns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to judge the unbelieving world.

The Greeters Do Not Have To Immediately Return To Their Original Place

Even if it could be demonstrated that the word did mean the delegation escorted the dignitary back to their original place, there is nothing that would prevent this return from occurring immediately.

Why couldn't it happen three and half years later or seven years later? There is nothing that demands an *immediate* return.

The Lord Comes For The Church, The Church Does Not Come To Meet Him

There is something else. At the rapture of the church, this multitude of living and resurrected believers is not going out to meet the dignitary, Christ. Instead Jesus Christ is catching them up to meet Him! They do not come out for the purpose of seeing Him. To the contrary, the Lord brings them to Himself. Thus, this word cannot have the same technical meaning in this context.

Therefore, when all the evidence is considered, we conclude that this argument should not be used as a determining factor as to when the rapture will take place.

Summary To Question 7

Does Paul Use A Technical Greek Term In Describing The Rapture Which Makes Clear It Is Post-Tribulation? (1 Thessalonians 4:17)

When the Apostle Paul wrote of the coming of the Lord, he used a particular Greek term, *apantasis*, that some see as an indisputable illustration of a post-tribulation rapture. The word supposedly has the technical meaning of a delegation going out to meet a visiting dignitary and then returning with that dignitary to the place where the greeters came from.

If this is what is meant by this Greek term, then it is solid evidence of a post-tribulation rapture. The post-tribulation position has the church being taken up to meet the Lord on His way to the earth and then accompanying Him on the remainder of His journey.

It is contended that each time the New Testament uses this word; it is used in this specific way. Therefore, the people would naturally understand the description of the rapture to include the Lord returning to the earth with those who came out to greet Him.

While this argument has been used by a number of writers in the past to argue for a post-tribulation rapture, it has not usually been emphasized that often in recent times. This is because the evidence is not convincing. Five things need to be pointed out.

First, the word in its verb form is not ever used in the New Testament for meeting an important person outside of a city and then bringing that person back to that city. In two different uses of this word in the gospels, the meeting takes place “within” the city, not outside of it. There is no idea whatsoever of any accompanying a dignitary from outside of the city and then going back to the city. Thus, the verb form does not have any special meaning whatsoever.

Second, it is not clear that the New Testament uses the noun form of the word in any technical sense of greeting a dignitary and then returning to the place of origin. Two of the four instances in which the noun form is used may refer to this practice but likewise they may not. The evidence is not decisive.

Third, the term *apantasis*, even if it is considered to be technical, does not mean the delegation brings the important person back to where they originally came from. It only refers to meeting that person outside of the city. The context must determine where the delegation goes with this person.

This is the issue that has to be decided with respect to the rapture. Does the Lord take the raptured people immediately to the earth or does He bring them with Him back to heaven? The direction of where these people are going is what is at issue. The word itself cannot give us the answer.

Fourth, even if one argues the people have to return to the place of origin of the greeters this does not mean it must happen immediately. It is perfectly proper to have an interval of time between the meeting and the return.

Finally, this proposed scenario does not fit a post-tribulation rapture. The people participating in the rapture are not going out to meet a coming dignitary. Instead, Jesus comes for them. He snatches them up in the air and brings them to Him! This is a huge difference.

Moreover, those on the earth are certainly not going to welcome Him as their Judge. When all the evidence is considered this argument does not solve the issue as to the timing of the rapture nor does it seem to provide any evidence of a post-tribulation translation of the church.

Question 8

When Does The Wrath Of God Begin? How Does God Protect Christians From His Divine Wrath?

There are two major issues which are hotly debated concerning the timing of the rapture. First, does the wrath of God begin at the start of the last seven-year period? Or is it in the middle of that period? Perhaps it begins toward the very end of the seventieth week of Daniel. Which of these views is true?

In addition, how are Christians protected from this divine wrath? Is it by removal from the earth or is it by God sheltering His people during the time of wrath? In many ways, the answer to these questions will determine the timing of the rapture.

Points Of Agreement

Before we look these issues, we must note that there are two matters which everyone agrees upon.

1. Christians Are Not Appointed To God's Wrath

In his letter to the Thessalonians Paul emphasized that Christians are not subject to divine wrath.

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:9 NIV).

Therefore, the wrath of God will not strike Christians. Basically, everyone agrees on this point.

2. Christians Will Suffer In This World

There is another point upon which Bible-believers are in agreement; Christians will suffer in this world. Nobody doubts this. Persecution and suffering will characterize the believers in Jesus Christ during this present age. Indeed, the New Testament makes it clear that believers will suffer. Jesus said:

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. (John 16:33 NIV).

Peter wrote something similar. He explained it in this manner:

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you (1 Peter 4:12 NIV).

Therefore, we conclude that divine wrath will *not* strike the New Testament church but believers will suffer from persecution and trials from unbelievers. This distinction needs to be made clear.

To sum up, the two issues for debate are these: when does the divine wrath begin and how are the Christians protected from it? These are the main issues that need to be resolved.

The Various Positions On The Timing Of God's Wrath

Those who hold the Pre-Tribulation view believe the Bible teaches that the entire seventieth week of Daniel is a time of God's divine wrath. Those who hold to a Mid-Tribulation view think the divine wrath starts in the

middle of the final seven-year period. The Pre-Wrath view has God's wrath beginning five and one-half years into the seventieth week of Daniel while the Post-Tribulation position sees the wrath coming at the very end. What does the Bible have to say about this?

The Pre-Trib Position

The Pre-Trib argument can be simply stated: if the entire seven-year period is a time of God's divine wrath then Christians won't be on the earth during that period seeing that the Lord has not appointed these New Testament believers to His wrath. Instead they will be removed from this time of judgment through the rapture of the church. Thus, God's protection for the church during the great tribulation will be through their removal.

While there will be believers on the earth during the great tribulation period, they will *not* be part of the New Testament church. They are known as the "tribulation saints." Many of them will suffer and die during this period. It seems that this will mainly be as a result of the persecutions from the final Antichrist.

Yet is it also possible that the various plagues which are sent will also strike them. This is an issue that is debated among those holding the Pre-Tribulation view.

Response To The Pre-Trib View

Those who hold other positions on the timing of the rapture respond in various ways.

First, they do not believe the entire seven-year period is a time of God's divine wrath.

Second, God often protects His people during these times by sheltering them from the judgments rather than removing them from the earth.

The objections are as follows.

When Does The Wrath Begin?

The key passage with respect to the time of God's divine wrath is found in Revelation 6:16,17 which reads as follows:

They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?" (Revelation 6:16,17 NIV).

Those who hold views other than the Pre-Trib position see this as either predicting that the wrath of God has just begun or that it is about to begin.

However, one of the problems with the wicked saying that the wrath is "about to begin" is that Scripture emphasizes that this divine wrath will come unexpectedly upon the ungodly:

Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 NIV).

If the wrath is unexpected, like a thief in the night, then how can the wicked announce that it is *about* to begin? They cannot. So that particular interpretation won't work.

However, it is possible to argue that the earth-dwellers are *beginning* to realize that God's wrath has just begun. The Greek text could be understood in that manner. If so, this would put the beginning of God's wrath at some point *after* the last seven-year period begins.

The Wrath Begins With Jesus Breaking The Seals

Nevertheless, there are a number of reasons for assuming the wrath begins much earlier.

First, Jesus made it clear that all judgment has been committed to Him. We read him saying the following:

Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son (John 5:22 NIV).

Jesus exercises this judgment of the earth in the breaking of the seals as recorded in Revelation chapter six. Indeed, Revelation chapters four and five make it clear that He alone has been given this authority.

The first seal begins the judgment of God upon the earth. In other words, God's divine wrath begins with the breaking of these seals. John wrote:

I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!" (Revelation 6:1 NIV).

God's wrath has begun. The fact that God does not *directly* intervene at this point is not the issue. Indeed, many times in Scripture we find that the Lord judges humanity through secondary causes. This is one of those cases. Jesus breaks the first seal to begin the judgment that is carried out upon the earth. It is His judgment!

Therefore, it seems best to conclude that God's wrath begins with the breaking of the first seal as recorded in Revelation chapter six.

Is The Church Protected During The Last Seven Year Period?

Even if the entire seven-year period is one characterized by the wrath of God one could argue that God would protect His people during this entire period. Thus, instead of delivering them out from the period, as the Pre-Tribulation view states, God could protect or shelter them *during* the time of wrath.

Indeed, we find the Lord did this with the various plagues of Egypt. The Bible says these plagues struck the Egyptians but did not touch the Israelites. We find that the Lord gave the following promise to His people:

On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt (Exodus 12:12-13 NIV).

The Egyptians were judged but the Israelites were protected from the plagues.

Why, it is asked, could not God do the same thing during the last seven-year period? The church could be delivered through God's protection rather than God removing them. Thus, God could shelter His people from His divine wrath as He unleashes it on the unbelieving world.

Believers Are Saved From This Time Period

While God could protect and shelter His people during the time of wrath Scripture is clear that the promises to the church includes *removal* from that period; not merely protection during it. Jesus said:

Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test those who live on the earth (Revelation 3:10 NIV).

This promise to the church is that they will “be kept from the hour of trial.” In other words, they will be removed from it. This removal is the rapture of the church. This also fits with the promise Paul wrote about. He emphasized the following:

While we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, (Titus 2:13 NIV).

The “blessed hope” is our removal from the earth during this awful period of God’s judgment upon the wicked.

This agrees with what Paul wrote earlier to the Thessalonians. He put it this way:

[Believers are] to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:10 NIV).

Jesus rescues the New Testament believers from the coming wrath by means of their removal from the earth.

The Egyptian Comparison Is Not The Same

There is another problem. The Jews who were protected from the plagues in Egypt all lived in the *same* geographical area. They were all together. The believers in this age live all over the world. This being the case it would seem difficult to see how the Lord could shelter each of them as these great judgments are hitting the entire earth. While certainly nothing is impossible with God, this does not seem to be what He intends to do.

There is something else. If God protects his people like he did with Israel in Egypt, why is there any need to shorten the days of the tribulation “for the elect’s sake?” None of it will touch the elect if they are protected.

Conclusion

To sum up, the Pre-Tribulation view seems to have the best answer as to when the wrath of God begins as well as how His people are protected during this time. Indeed, the entire seven-year period is a time of God’s judgment upon the earth.

Furthermore, the promised protection for the New Testament church is “removal” from the earth; not sheltering them through it.

This being the case, the belief that the church will not be around during that time appears to be the one that best fits all of the facts.

Summary To Question 8

When Does The Wrath Of God Begin? How Does God Protect Christians From His Divine Wrath?

There are a number of key issues in the debate over the timing of the rapture of the church. One of the most important issues centers on the question of when the divine wrath of God begins to strike the people of the earth. If the entire seven-year period can be viewed as a period of God’s wrath, then the argument can be made for a pre-tribulation rapture. However, if the wrath does not begin until later in the seventieth week of Daniel, the Great Tribulation period, then other rapture positions would seem to have more evidence on their side.

Those who believe the wrath of God is not poured out and the beginning of the seventieth week of Daniel offer the following arguments for their position.

The first part of the tribulation period, the seventieth week of Daniel, will be a time of trouble but that trouble will come from human wrath, not divine wrath. The antichrist, the man of sin, through the influence of the Devil himself, will persecute believers. Many will be put to death for their faith. While it will be a difficult period for believers it will be nothing like the time to come when God's wrath is poured out. It is only the last part of the tribulation period where divine judgments are poured out upon the earth. The initial part is human wrath not divine wrath.

Furthermore, while it is true that the Lamb, Jesus Christ, initiates the judgments by opening the scroll and breaking the seals (Revelation 5) many of the events which follow are not by God's direct initiative and thus God cannot be held responsible for them. Therefore, we should be careful to distinguish between God's wrath and human wrath. Since God's wrath does not begin at the start of the seventieth week of Daniel there is no need for a pre-tribulation rapture to rescue people from the wrath of God.

These arguments have not convinced everyone. Indeed, there are many reasons given as to why the entire seventieth week of Daniel should be seen as a time of God's wrath. For one thing, the breaking of the seals by the Lamb makes it clear that all of the subsequent judgments are divine in their character. Furthermore, a number of these judgments are universal in nature. Consequently, it is not possible to limit them to the end of the seventieth week of Daniel.

When God's divine wrath begins is a fundamental question in the rapture debate. The fact that it seems to begin at the very start of the seventieth week of Daniel is further evidence for a pre-tribulation rapture.

Question 9

Does The Bible Teach That Christ Could Come At Any Moment? (The Imminent Coming Of Christ?)

One of the key issues in the question of the timing of the rapture of the church has to do with the “any moment” or “imminent” coming of the Lord. Simply put, the question is this: Does the Bible teach that Jesus Christ could come back at any moment or must certain things happen before He returns to the earth?

A Correct Understanding Of Imminency Is Needed

To begin with, we need a proper definition of the term “imminency.” Much confusion will be avoided if we correctly define the word and its implications. Simply stated, imminency speaks of something important that is definitely going to happen and that *could* happen at any moment.

However, it may *not* take place soon. In other words, it could happen today, it could happen years from now. It will happen but nobody knows exactly when it will take place.

With this basic definition, we can make the following observations as to how this relates to the subject of the rapture of the church.

1. Christ May Come At Any Moment

First, Jesus Christ can come at any moment for His church! He could come today He may not come today. No human being knows the exact moment. Imminency says it is *possible* for the Lord to return at any time.

2. There Are No Signs Announcing His Coming

Add to this, the rapture of the church is a signless event. In other words, it will be unannounced and, for the most part, unexpected by the human race. Thus, Christ may come at any moment and when He does come there will be no signs preceding it. None whatsoever.

3. No Prophesied Event Must Take Place Before The Rapture

There is a third point which needs to be emphasized. Biblically speaking, there is nothing that *must* take place before the Lord comes for His church. The rapture of the church is the next important event on the prophetic calendar.

Consequently, the predicted events of the last days such as the rise of the final Antichrist, the abomination of desolation, and the battle of Armageddon, will all take place *after* the rapture of the church. While certain prophetic events *may* take place to set the stage for His coming, they do not have to occur before the Lord Jesus comes for His church.

This understanding of imminency means that every generation of believers is watching and waiting for the coming of Jesus Christ. Since it is the next event in the revealed program of God there is that anticipation that it could occur at any moment. This is what we mean by the “doctrine of imminency.”

Now the question before us is this: does the Scripture teach this doctrine of imminency? As we look at the New Testament it seems that the believers were anticipating the Lord to come back at any moment. We can make the following observations.

4. The Words Of Jesus Imply Imminency

In a number of places, Jesus spoke of His imminent return. On the night of His betrayal He said:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. My Father's house has plenty of room; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:1-3 NIV).

Believers are to look for the Lord to take us out from this world and to bring us into the house of His Father. This is our hope. In fact, Paul calls this our "blessed hope." He wrote about what we are waiting for:

While we wait for the blessed hope--the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13 NIV)

The hope of believers is for Christ to take us from this world so that we may be with Him. This being the case, we are commanded to watch and wait for His return. Jesus said:

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour (Matthew 25:13 NIV).

The fact that we are told to "keep watch" implies that it could happen at any time.

5. The Writings Of Paul Reflect An Any Moment Coming Of The Lord

The Apostle Paul wrote with the expectation that Jesus Christ could come at any moment. He encouraged the believers to look for the coming of the Lord. Paul wrote to the Philippians:

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20 NIV)

We are awaiting a Savior. These words are only meaningful if Christ can come at any moment.

Paul also said that Jesus is the one who rescues us from the "coming wrath:"

And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:10 NIV).

The "rescue" which believers are looking for is the rapture of the church.

6. The Hope Of The Apostle Paul To Be Involved In The Rapture

While Paul did not know whether or not he would live to see the rapture of the church, he thought it was possible. He wrote to the Corinthians:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51-52 NIV).

Notice that Paul placed himself in the category of those who may not die. In other words, he thought it was possible that he would live to see that day.

His words were even stronger to the Thessalonians. He put himself in the category of those who are alive and remain until the Lord's coming:

According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep (1 Thessalonians 4:15 NIV).

Paul thought he may be alive until the coming of Christ. This is consistent with what he wrote earlier to the Thessalonians:

For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? (1 Thessalonians 2:19 NIV).

Paul thought it was possible that his ministry would end with the coming of the Lord rather than his own death. This is further evidence that he believed in the imminent coming of the Lord.

To sum up, it seems that the New Testament was written from the perspective that the return of the Lord could happen at any moment.

7. All Other Rapture Views Are Not Looking For An Imminent Return

All of the other rapture views deny the imminent return of Christ. Indeed, each of them maintains that certain events *must* happen before the Lord returns. This includes the arrival of the final Antichrist, and the abomination that causes desolation. Only the Pre-Tribulation view anticipates the coming of Christ at any moment.

Objections To The Idea Of Imminency

While the Scriptures teach that Christ could come at any moment there are those who have objected to this. The following passages are usually cited to show that the coming of Christ was not imminent for those living in New Testament times.

1. The Temple In Jerusalem Had To Be Destroyed

Jesus said that the Temple in Jerusalem had to be destroyed. We find the Lord predicting the destruction of the Temple as follows:

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:1-3 NIV).

Therefore, it is argued that the Lord could not come back for His own people until this prediction was fulfilled.

Consequently, He could not return immediately for the believers in the rapture of the church.

2. The City In Jerusalem Had To Be Destroyed

The Bible also says that the city of Jerusalem had to be destroyed. Upon entering Jerusalem for the last time, we read the following:

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come on you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every

side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you" (Luke 19:41-44 NIV).

The city of Jerusalem had to be judged at some future time before Jesus could return. Again, it is contended that this seems to refute any idea of an imminent or any moment rapture.

3. Jerusalem Would Be Under Gentile Control For A Long Time

Jesus also predicted that the Jews would lose control over the city of Jerusalem and that the Jewish people would be led away captive:

They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:24 NIV).

Though the Jews would be led away captive among the nations Jesus also said that this situation would end someday. This would occur when the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. The inference, however, is that Jerusalem would be in Gentile control for a long period of time.

This has happened as Jesus predicted. In fact, the Gentile control of Jerusalem was for over 1,900 years. It was not until 1967 that the Jews once again had the city of Jerusalem under Jewish control with Israel as a reconstituted nation.

The point of all of this is that these things took a considerable amount of time. Until they occurred, there could be no "any moment" rapture of the church.

4. Jesus Corrected The Misconception The Kingdom Was Arriving Soon

The people may have thought that the Lord would appear the moment the city of Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed. Jesus, however, corrected that misconception with the following parable:

While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. He said: "A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return" (Luke 19:11,12 NIV).

This is another indication that the coming of the Lord would not be at "any moment" for the believers. Note that the man went to a *distant* country before he was appointed king. This assumes that a long period of time will elapse.

5. Peter Had To Grow Old And Die

Jesus told Peter that he had to grow old and die. Furthermore, he would be led away to his death. Jesus said to him:

Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go. Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me" (John 21:18-19 NIV).

If this is the case, then the rapture could not occur until the time Peter grew to be an old man and then died at the hand of others.

6. Paul Had To Preach The Word In Rome

The Apostle Paul had to preach the good news to those in Rome. We read about this in the Book of Acts:

After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. “After I have been there,” he said, “I must visit Rome also” (Acts 19:21 NIV).

This was again later directly confirmed by the Lord when He appeared to Paul. We later read in the Book of Acts:

The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome” (Acts 23:11 NIV).

The rapture of the church could not occur until Paul visited Rome since Paul, being a member of the New Testament church, would not be left behind.

7. The Gospel Had To Be Preached To The Entire World

Scripture tells us that the good news about Jesus had to be preached to everyone in the world. Before His ascension into heaven, Jesus said:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8 NIV).

Jesus said that His disciples must take this message to the entire world. Consequently, the rapture of the church could not occur until this took place.

8. The Believers In Smyrna Had To Suffer Ten Days

We are told in the Book of Revelation that it was necessary for the church in Smyrna to suffer for ten days:

Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown (Revelation 2:10 NIV).

While ten days is not a long period of time, it still constitutes “some” period of time which must occur before the rapture could take place. Until the church in Smyrna experienced this suffering, the rapture of the church could not happen.

Thus, the idea of an “any moment” rapture is rejected because Scripture predicts certain events have to occur before the Lord returns. Some of these events would, of necessity, take a long time.

The Pre-Tribulation Response

Those who hold to the Pre-Tribulation view answer these objections against imminency as follows.

We Must Correctly Understand Imminency

In responding to these objections, we come back to what we originally stated in answering this question; the importance of a correct definition of imminency.

Again, we stress that there is the basic misconception when speaking of the imminent return of Christ. It is assumed that it speaks of the *soon* return of Christ. While an imminent event could happen soon it does not necessarily have to. It may take place *at any time*. Therefore, saying the rapture of the church is imminent means that it could happen at any moment, but it does not have to happen soon.

While the rapture of the church is imminent, the Second Coming of Christ is not. Most Christians agree with this. There is a final seven-year period, the seventieth week of Daniel, which ends when Jesus Christ returns in glory. A number of predicted events *must* occur during that seven-year period. Consequently, the Second Coming of Christ cannot happen at any moment.

Response To The Objections

As far as the specific objections that are raised against an imminent coming of Christ, we make the following response.

There Are Two Ways To Respond To This Objection

To begin with, there are a couple of ways in which those holding the Pre-Tribulation view have responded to these objections.

Many Of The Previous Hindrances Are No Longer Obstacles

First, they note that many of the hindrances to the imminent coming of the Lord in the first century, such as the death of Peter, Paul going to Rome, the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple, have long been fulfilled. Therefore, they are now non-issues.

Consequently, none of these predicted events are standing in the way of the Lord coming for His church.

We Should Not Necessarily Assume They Ever Were Hindrances

Furthermore, we should not assume that these were hindrances for the early church for the rapture to occur at “any moment.” We can make the following observations.

Peter’s Death Was Not A Hindrance

For example, Peter was told by Jesus that he would “grow old” but the Lord did not specify how old Peter would live to be.

In fact, early in the history of the church, after King Herod killed the Apostle James, he put Peter into prison. Herod’s intention was to execute Peter also. The early church *prayed* that this would not happen.

Nowhere do we find that they assumed Peter would not die at this time because of Jesus’ promise that he would live to a ripe old age. Instead, they expected Peter’s immediate death.

When the servant girl Rhoda told the praying church that Peter had escaped the clutches of Herod, they told her that she was “crazy.” Then when Peter did appear they were astonished. The Bible records what happened as follows:

“You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.” But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished (Acts 12:15-16 NIV).

Thus, Jesus' promise to Peter did not stop the church for looking for the coming of Christ at any moment.

In addition, Peter himself told his readers to look for the coming of the Lord. He wrote the following:

Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation" But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. . . . So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him (2 Peter 3:3-5, 10,14 NIV).

Notice that Peter said the "day of the Lord" would come unexpectedly. Thus, they should live a spotless life in anticipation of Jesus' coming. Peter said nothing about the necessity of him dying before this could take place.

John Could Have Lived To See The Lord's Return

Furthermore, we have one passage that shows the early church believed Jesus Christ could return at any time. Indeed, they thought that it was possible that the Apostle John may have lived until the time Christ returned. This idea came from a statement of Jesus in reply to an answer to a question from Peter. We read the following:

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" (John 21:20-23 NIV).

Since the first generation of believers believed it was possible that John would live to see the return of the Lord this shows that they were not waiting for intervening events to take place. Instead, they believed that Jesus could return at any moment.

We Must Distinguish Between Rapture Passages And The Second Coming Passages

Again, we stress that it is important to correctly distinguish between those passages which speak of the imminent coming of the Lord, the rapture, and other passages which speak of looking for signs, the Second Coming. This is where much confusion occurs.

Imminency Means A Pre-Tribulation Rapture

It must be emphasized that if imminency can be demonstrated from the New Testament, then the rapture of the church has to be *before* the seventieth week of Daniel begins. All sides admit this. From the evidence we have looked at it seems that the New Testament writers considered the possibility that Jesus Christ could come back for them at any time. This being the case it seems that they were looking for a Pre-Tribulation rapture.

The fact that two thousand years have elapsed between the time of Jesus' ascension and the present-day does not contradict the doctrine of imminency. What is clear is that Christ *could* come at any moment.

In summary, the church is promised protection from the wrath of God on the basis of 1 Thessalonians 1:10 and 5:9. The time of God's wrath is the entire seven-year Tribulation, not just the second half of the Tribulation or the final outpouring of wrath before the return of Christ.

Summary To Question 9

Does The Bible Teach That Christ Could Come At Any Moment (The Imminent Coming Of Christ)?

One of the controversial areas with respect to the rapture or translation of the church is the question as to whether it could occur at any moment. Is it imminent? Those who reject the imminent coming of Christ argue that certain things which were predicted in Scripture to occur needed to be fulfilled before Jesus could return. Consequently, it was not possible for Jesus to immediately return for His people. The following examples are usually given.

To begin with, Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. It is not possible for Him to return until this was fulfilled. Thus, believers could not look for an “any moment” rapture.

Jesus said the city of Jerusalem must be destroyed due to their rejection of Him. Therefore, He could not come back until that occurred.

Jesus also said that the people in Jerusalem had to lead away captive into all nations while Jerusalem was under Gentile rule. There is the inference that this would take place over a long period of time. Indeed it has! It was not until 1967 that the Jews had sovereign control over Jerusalem in a reconstituted nation. Before this time, it was not possible for the rapture to take place.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus corrected a misconception that the kingdom of God was arriving immediately. This is another indication that it would be some time before He would return to the earth.

Thus, the rapture of the church had to be delayed, it was not imminent.

Jesus also predicted the manner in which Peter would die. He told him that when he grew old others would take him away to his death. This means that there had to be an interval of time before Peter died. If the believers were looking for an, “any moment” rapture they had to wait until Peter’s death.

Paul said that he had to preach the gospel in Rome. This was confirmed a second time by the Lord Himself. This being the case, the Lord could not come back for the believers until Paul fulfilled what the Holy Spirit promised him.

Jesus said the message of the gospel had to be spread to the entire world. This would obviously take some time to fulfill. Since it is believers which preach the gospel, it would not happen immediately. Until this command was fulfilled, an “any moment” rapture was not possible.

In the Book of Revelation we find that the Lord told the believers in the city of Smyrna that they would have to suffer tribulation for “ten days.” Until that suffering was completed, the rapture of the church could not happen.

All of these things had to happen because they were predicted by the Lord or by His spokesmen. This being the case, it was impossible for the early Christians to expect the rapture to occur at any moment.

Therefore, the doctrine of an imminent rapture is not considered to be biblical.

There is a question as to whether or not the New Testament believers thought Jesus Christ could return at any moment. The question of the imminent coming of Christ has divided interpreters of Bible prophecy. Those who argue that Jesus could have returned at any moment do so for a number of reasons.

While there may have been obstacles to keep Christ from coming back in the first few years of the church, all of these obstacles have been removed. There is nothing now to keep Him from returning to the earth at any moment.

A close look at Scripture seems to show that the early church anticipated an immediate return of Christ. From the words of Jesus, the first generation of believers thought it was possible that John the Apostle might live to see the coming of the Lord. This indicates they were prepared for an “any moment” return of Christ.

In the two main passages where Paul spoke of the rapture, he placed himself in the category of those which might experience this event while still living. Therefore, it seems to follow that he believed that the coming of Christ for His church may be at any moment.

One final thing we should note. It is proper to conclude that if the New Testament does indeed teach the “any moment” return of Christ, then the pre-tribulation rapture must be true. None of the other views of the rapture of the church allow for the any moment return of Christ. This is not an issue for debate.

However, if the doctrine of imminency cannot be clearly proven from the New Testament this does not mean the pre-tribulation rapture is not true. There could be a pre-tribulation rapture whether or not the Bible teaches the idea of an, “any moment” rapture.

Consequently the question remains, “What does the New Testament teach about the timing of the rapture of the church?” There is much evidence to assume it could happen at any moment.

Question 10

Do The Various Greek Terms Used To Describe The Rapture Settle The Question As To Its Timing?

Pretribulationists are often charged with imposing their system upon Scripture because they believe that the return of Christ will happen in two parts but all views must recognize that there are two phases to Christ's coming – the rapture first and then the return to earth to judge the world and set up the kingdom

It may appear simpler to read all of the passages as if the rapture and the Second Coming were one event, but this is just an assumption which also needs to be supported by biblical arguments

Doing a word study will not answer the question since there are many words for Christ's return and since some of them are used in both "rapture" and "Second Coming" passages

As we examine the New Testament, we find that the rapture of the church is described by a number of different Greek words. By looking at these terms we can get a better idea of what Scripture teaches about this important doctrine. The evidence is as follows.

1. Paralambano (To Take To Oneself)

The first term we need to consider is *paralambano*. This word has the idea of "to receive to oneself." Jesus used it when He spoke about coming again and taking, or receiving, believers unto Himself:

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you [*paralambano*] to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:3 NIV).

This speaks of the Lord Jesus coming for His own, the rapture.

Yet this word does not always have that technical meaning. For example, we read of Jesus taking the disciples with Him as He withdrew from the crowds:

When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them [*paralambano*] with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida (Luke 9:10 NIV).

Therefore, while *paralambano* may speak of the rapture it is not always used in the New Testament of this particular event.

2. Rhuomai (Rescue)

This Greek word has the idea "to rescue." Paul wrote the following to the Thessalonians about how Jesus will rescue believers from the coming wrath:

And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues [*rhuomai*] us from the coming wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:10 NIV).

Jesus is going to rescue us from the coming wrath. He will do it by means of the rapture of the church. The Lord will come for His own, the Christians, and then He will bring us back to the Father's house.

While this is the only time this particular verb is used in the New Testament, there is a noun form of the word. Paul uses it in this manner:

And in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob” (Romans 11:26 NIV).

In this context, the word is translated “deliverer.” The Lord promised that He will deliver or rescue His people, Israel.

Again, while the word has the basic idea of rescue or deliver, it is not a technical term.

3. Harpadzo (To Be Caught Up)

Harpadzō is the Greek word from which the English term “rapture” is derived. This is by way of the Latin word *rapere*. It is the key word which speaks of the coming event, the rapture of the church.

The Living Believers Will Be Caught Up (The Rapture)

This word is used in the main passage for the rapture, First Thessalonians 4:17. It says:

After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together [*harpadzō*] with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:17 NIV).

In this passage, we find that the living believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. They will be raptured.

Paul Was Caught Up

The Greek word *harpadzō* is also used of an individual being caught up to heaven. Paul gave the following testimony:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up [*harpadzō*] to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know--God knows. And I know that this man--whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows--was caught up [*harpadzō*] to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell (2 Corinthians 12:2-4 NIV).

Here is an example of a person being “caught up” to meet the Lord.

The Male Child Is Caught Up

In the Book of Revelation, we are told that the male child gets caught up to God:

She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up [*harpadzō*] to God and to his throne (Revelation 12:5).

This is another illustration of the word used of someone being “snatched away.”

Philip Was Snatched Away

Another example of this can be found in the life of Philip the evangelist. Scripture records him being snatched away by the Spirit of the Lord. We read the following:

When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away [*harpadzō*], and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea (Acts 8:39-40 NIV).

“Carried away” is a translation of the Greek term *harpadzō*. In this instance, Philip was taken by the Lord from one geographical place, on the Gaza road, and then brought to another place, Azotus.

Thus, we have a number of passages in which this particular word has the meaning of “carrying away believers.”

It Can Mean Take By Force

While this word *harpadzō* may speak of individuals, or groups of people, being caught up to meet the Lord, or moved from one place to another, the word does not always have this particular meaning. In some contexts, it has the idea of taking something by force. Jesus said:

From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it [*harpadzō*] (Matthew 11:12 NIV).

In this context, the word has the idea of taking something by violent force.

We read in John’s gospel about how the people wanted to take Jesus by force and make Him their king:

Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, [*harpadzō*] withdrew again to a mountain by himself (John 6:15 NIV).

Therefore, the word *harpadzō* can have the idea of a forceful removal.

Consequently, while the term can have the meaning of being snatched away, as in the rapture of the church, it does not always have that meaning. As always, context must determine the meaning of the word.

4. Episunagoge (To Assemble Together)

This word has the idea of being “assembled” or “gathered together.” Paul wrote of the time when the believers would be gathered together at the coming of the Lord:

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, [*episunagoge*] we ask you, brothers and sisters, to him, we ask you, brothers (2 Thessalonians 2:1 NIV).

In this context, it speaks of the believers being gathered together to the Lord Jesus.

However, the word is also used of believers meeting together here upon the earth. We read about this in the Book of Hebrews:

Not giving up meeting together, [*episunagoge*] as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:25 NIV).

This context has nothing to do with the rapture or the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

5. Allasso (To Change Or Transform)

The Greek word *allasso* has the idea of “changing” or “transforming.” Paul used this word in consecutive verses when speaking about the rapture of the church. The rapture event includes the changing or transformation of believers. He explained it in this manner:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed [*allasso*]¹—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed [*allasso*] (1 Corinthians 15:51-52 NIV).

Believers in Christ have the promise of a coming day when we will all be changed. What a great promise indeed!

On the other hand, the writer to the Hebrews uses the same word to describe the physical heavens. He said that they will be “changed.” He wrote:

You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed [*allasso*]. But you remain the same, and your years will never end (Hebrews 1:12 NIV).

Thus, we find no technical meaning of this Greek word *allasso* in this verse.

6. Apokalupsis (Unveil)

This word has the idea of someone, or something, being “revealed” or “unveiled.” It is used of the coming of the Lord. Peter wrote:

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed [*apokalupsis*] at his coming (1 Peter 1:13 NIV).

Jesus Christ is revealed to believers at the rapture of the church.

In another context, the term is also used to refer to the Second Coming of Christ:

And give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed [*apokalupsis*] from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels (2 Thessalonians 1:7 NIV).

Therefore, the term *apokalupsis* is used of both the rapture of the church and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

In still another context, this word is used about direct revelation which Paul himself received. We read of this usage in 1 Corinthians:

Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation [*apokalupsis*] or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? (1 Corinthians 14:6 NIV).

This is another example of a word which can refer to the rapture of the church in one context but not necessarily in another.

7. Epiphaneia (Coming, Appearing)

The Greek word *epiphaneia* speaks of the “appearing of Christ.” Depending upon the context, it can refer to either the rapture of the church or the Second Coming of Christ. When Paul wrote to Titus, he used this word to describe the rapture:

While we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing [*epiphaneia*] of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13 NIV).

Our blessed hope is the looking forward to this glorious appearing of the Lord when He comes for His church.

Paul uses this term on another occasion to refer to the Lord's appearing at the rapture of the church. He wrote to Timothy:

To keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing [*epiphaneia*] of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 6:14).

We find this term *epiphaneia* also used of the Second Coming when the Lord judges the "man of sin" or the final Antichrist.

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor [*epiphaneia*] of his coming (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

In this instance, the word is translated as "splendor." Consequently, this term *epiphaneia* is used of the coming or the appearing of the Lord. Sometimes it speaks of the rapture of the church while at other times it refers to His Second Coming. Whether these are two distinct events separated by time, or two parts of one complex event, cannot be determined by the word itself. Other factors must be used to make that decision.

8. Parousia (Coming, Presence)

This particular noun is used a number of times in the New Testament with respect to the coming of the Lord. It has the idea of "coming or presence." Paul used it to speak of the coming of Christ at the rapture.

But in this order: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, [*parousia*] those who belong to him (1 Corinthians 15:23 NIV).

James wrote that the coming of the Lord is near at hand:

You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming [*parousia*] is near (James 5:8 NIV).

Again, this is a reference to the Lord's coming at the rapture.

We also find this word not only refers of the rapture, it is also used for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to the earth. Paul wrote the following to the Thessalonians:

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming [*parousia*] (2 Thessalonians 2:8 NIV).

On this occasion *parousia* is used of the return of Christ to the earth; the Second Coming. Because this word is used of both the rapture of the church and the Second Coming, many take this to mean that it is talking about the same event.

Yet, we again stress that this is a conclusion we should *not* make based merely on the particular word used. While it is legitimate for someone to come to that conclusion based upon other factors, they should not do it based on the meaning of the word or the fact that this word describes both the rapture and the Second Coming.

Indeed, the word does not always have a technical meaning of the Lord's coming. When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he used the term to signify his own presence among the members of this church:

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence [*parousia*], but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12 NIV).

In this instance, the word has the idea of Paul's presence among the Philippians.

Observations On These Terms

After looking at these various words, there are at least four observations we can make about these terms which are used in certain contexts of the rapture of the church. They are as follows.

1. These Are Not Strictly Technical Terms

It is clear that these Greek words which are used for the rapture of the church are *not* strictly technical terms. As we have observed, they have a number of different meanings. The meaning is determined by the context in which it is used.

2. They Are Not Always Used In A Context Of The Rapture

Since they are not strictly technical terms, we are not surprised to find them used in contexts other than the rapture of the church or the coming of the Lord. As we have seen, they do refer to something apart from the rapture of the church or the Second Coming of Christ when used in other contexts.

3. Three Of The Terms Are Used Of Both The Second Coming And The Rapture

Three of the words, *parousia*, *apokalupsis*, and *epiphaneia* are used for both the rapture of the church and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, when we find these words in Scripture, and the subject is the coming of Christ, we must determine whether it is referring to the rapture or the Second Coming based upon the “context.” The mere word itself *cannot* determine the answer.

4. The Words Themselves Do Not Establish The Timing Of The Rapture

This last point is extremely important. While these words are used of the rapture in some contexts, they tell us nothing about the timing of this event; merely that it will occur. We have to discover when the rapture will occur by factors other than the various Greek words used to describe it. We should not make the mistake of assuming the meaning of these words will give us the answer to the question as to when the rapture will take place. They do not. This must be clearly understood.

Therefore, while some of these terms may be used of both the rapture of the church and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ this does not necessarily mean they are speaking of the same event. They may be speaking of two distinct events separated by an interval of time rather than one complex event. The answer to this question will be discovered by considering other factors such as context and the overall teaching of the Bible on the subject.

These facts should help us put this issue of the timing of the “catching up of the church” into proper perspective.

Summary To Question 10

Do The Various Greek Terms Used To Describe The Rapture Settle The Question As To Its Timing?

There are a number of Greek terms used in the New Testament to describe the coming event known as the rapture, or translation, of the church. From these different words we can learn much about this important doctrine. The following terms are used to describe this event.

The Greek term *paralambano* is used by Jesus to refer to His coming to receive believers unto Himself. The word has the idea of receiving something or someone. When the rapture occurs Jesus will come for His own people and take them unto Himself.

Paul said Jesus is going to “rescue” the believers at His coming. He used the Greek term *rhuomai* to describe this event. The rapture will be that rescue.

The Greek word *harpadzō* is where we derive the English word “rapture.” It can mean to “snatch” or “catch away.” The believers who are alive will be instantaneously caught up to meet the Lord.

Paul wrote about the believers being gathered together to meet the Lord. The Greek word he used is *episunagoge*. The idea is that they will be assembled when the rapture takes place.

Jesus will “change” or “transform” our physical bodies at His coming. Paul used the Greek word *allasso* to describe this marvelous event.

The word *apokalupsis* means “unveiling” or “revealing.” Jesus will be revealed, or unveiled, to the church at the rapture. It is used of both the rapture of the church as well as the Second Coming of Christ.

The word *epiphaneia* has the idea of the appearing or the presence of the Lord. This is what believers are looking forward to; the appearing of the Lord in glory. This word also is used of the rapture of the church in certain contexts and the Second Coming of Christ in other contexts.

Jesus’ coming is described by the Greek word *parousia*. As is true with the Greek words *apokalupsis* and *epiphaneia* this “coming” sometimes refers to the rapture while at other times the Second Coming is in view. Again, context must determine the exact meaning.

In examining the way in which these words were used in the New Testament, we discovered a number of things. First, none of these terms used of the rapture are strictly technical terms. Indeed, they have a range of meaning which is determined by the context alone.

Indeed, almost every one of them is used in the New Testament to describe something other than the rapture of the church. This is further indication that we are not dealing with strictly technical terms.

We also find that three of the terms, *parousia*, *apokalupsis*, and *epiphaneia* are used to describe the rapture of the church in one context as well as the Second Coming of Christ in another context. Consequently it is clear that the mere word itself does not determine which event is in view.

From the words themselves it is not possible to determine if the rapture of the church and the Second Coming is one single event with two aspects or two separate events separated by an interval of time. Thus, it is proper to conclude that we cannot decide the issue of the timing of the rapture of the church based solely upon these words used to describe it. Other factors must be considered.

Question 11

Who Or What Is Restraining The Final Antichrist? (2 Thessalonians 2:6-8)

When Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, he said that something or someone was presently restraining the coming of the man of sin, the final Antichrist. He put it this way:

And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming (2 Thessalonians 2:6-8 NIV).

This passage has been cited by those who hold to the idea of a Pre-Tribulation rapture as further evidence that the church will not be around when the events of the great tribulation occur. They argue that the restraining force has to be the Holy Spirit working through the members of the New Testament church. Once the church has been removed from the world, by means of the Lord catching them up to meet Him in the air, the Holy Spirit would not be dwelling in any individual. This would allow for the unrestrained evil at the beginning of this time period.

Of course, not everyone agrees with this identification of the restrainer. Other suggestions have been offered as to Paul's meaning here. Because of the importance of this issue we will look at the various suggestions in detail.

The Issues That Need Answering

There are a number of issues involved in properly interpreting the text as it stands. We can sum them up as follows.

1. Is The Restrainer Personal Or Impersonal Or Both?

One of the questions has to do with the way in which the "restrainer" is described. In verse six, the Greek text speaks of the "thing" which restrains.

The word translated "restrainer" is in the neuter gender in Greek. However, in verse seven, the restrainer is described in the masculine gender. This could refer to something personal. In other words, the first description is impersonal while the next description may be personal. Therefore, it is possible that this restrainer can be described as both a force and a person.

2. Is The Restrainer Good Or Evil?

There is also the question as to whether the restrainer should be seen as something or someone who is good or something or someone who is evil. Christians are divided over this also.

3. Is The Restrainer Natural Or Supernatural?

Another issue that has to be decided is whether this restrainer is something or someone who is merely natural or whether we are dealing with something or someone who is supernatural. This also must be decided.

4. Who Or What Is Capable Of Restraining Sin?

The ultimate decision on the identity of the restrainer goes back to the larger question of who or what, after all, is capable of restraining sin to such an extent that the “man of sin,” the final Antichrist, cannot be revealed until the restraint is removed.

Summing Up: What We Do Know

What we do know is this: according to Paul, before this “man of sin,” the final Antichrist, can be revealed, some “one,” or some “thing,” good or evil, must be taken away, or removed, out of the way. Whatever the identity of the restrainer may be, it *must* be capable of restraining sin.

At the time of Paul’s writing to the Thessalonians this restrainer was preventing the man of sin from being revealed. At some future time this restrainer will be removed and then the final Antichrist will be revealed to the world. Interestingly, Paul had already told the Thessalonians the identity of this restrainer. He wrote:

And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time (2 Thessalonians 2:6 NIV).

Yet he never revealed the identity of the restrainer in any of his letters which still exist. While the Thessalonians knew who or what the restrainer was, we are uncertain.

The Identity Of The Restrainer

As can be imagined, many suggestions have been offered as to the identity of this restrainer. The more popular identifications include the following.

Option 1: It Is A Mystery Which Cannot Be Answered

To begin with, there are those who believe that the identity of the restrainer cannot be determined with any assurance. In other words, for some reason, God has decided *not* to make this known to us. The best we can do is to speculate as to who or what this restrainer may be but we cannot be certain of his or its identity.

Response

While this is possible, it is not a necessary conclusion. Indeed, as we look at the evidence it seems like it is possible to determine the identity of what is still restraining the appearance of the final Antichrist.

Option 2: Human Government: The Roman Empire And The Emperor

A popular view says that it is human government which is presently restraining the coming Antichrist. In particular, at the time of Paul, it was the Roman Empire and its emperor which restrained the forces of evil and chaos. The idea is that the Christian community had the freedom to work quietly and go about its business while the empire and emperor were restraining evil. Once the governmental restraint would be taken away then the man of sin could be revealed.

This depiction also fits well with the restrainer being described in both impersonal and personal terms. The impersonal depiction would refer to the government while the personal would be a description of the Roman emperor.

Since Rome and its emperor are no longer in power it is human government in general which presently holds back evil. When these restraining forces are taken out of the way, then the man of sin will be revealed.

Response

While this view is popular, it seems to be inadequate for a number of reasons. For one thing, *all* human governments can trace their origin back to God. He is the One who originally instituted it. Scripture also says that the Lord controls all governments. The psalmist wrote:

Do not lift your horns against heaven; do not speak so defiantly. No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt themselves. It is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another (Psalm 75:5–7 NIV).

Human governments only exist because God wills them to exist. They have no power or authority on their own. Thus, it is hard to see how they, by themselves, can restrain evil.

There is a bigger problem. It cannot be human government which is restraining the coming of the Antichrist since Scripture indicates that he will be the leader of a huge government, the revived Roman Empire. Thus, during the great tribulation this final human government will be under satanic control. Rather than restraining evil, this government with its leader will be the promoter of all evil.

Consequently, the Roman Empire, or human government, should not be seen as what is necessary to be removed. If restraint of sin is taken away from this world, it must be by some type of supernatural removal.

Option 3: Michael The Archangel

It seems that whatever is presently restraining sin has to be something supernatural. A number of people have suggested that the restrainer is some benevolent supernatural figure. Those who argue for a personal restrainer make the case for it being Michael the archangel. The Bible says that Michael is the one who throws Satan down to earth.

We read the following in the Book of Revelation:

Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him (Revelation 12:7-9 NIV).

This has convinced some people that Michael is the restrainer.

Response

The idea that the restrainer is Michael the archangel has not gained much popularity. In fact, we are specifically told that Michael had to call upon the Lord to keep Satan from taking the body of Moses:

But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" (Jude 9 NIV).

This episode seems to rule out Michael as a possibility.

Option 4: Satan

Some Christians actually believe that it is Satan himself who is the supernatural force which is presently restraining evil. Those who argue this way think we are making a mistake by assuming the restrainer is something good. Satan is waiting for his appointed time to reveal the man of sin to the world in the same way the Lord waited for the fullness of time to reveal Jesus Christ.

Response

The problem with this view is that it gives the devil too much power to carry out his plan. It is the Lord who is control of all things, not Satan. Further, if Satan is the god of this world and the control of governments are already in his hand, then it does not make sense for Satan to be seen as the restraining force. Otherwise Satan would be restraining Satan. We should never think that Satan himself restrains evil though he may indeed disguise it at times.

Option 5: The Holy Spirit Working Through The Church Preaching Of The Gospel

This seems to be the best answer to this question. The restraint of evil is presently carried on by the Holy Spirit working through the members of the New Testament church, the Christians, who are proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ to the world. Evidence for this can be listed as follows.

Only God Can Restrain Evil

For one thing, it is only God who can restrain evil. The member of the Godhead who has a restraining ministry is the Holy Spirit. Indeed, from the very nature of the Holy Spirit, we could rightly conclude that He would be engaged in a ministry designed to restrain sin in the world. As one looks at His various ministries, we find that many of them are involved in restraining sin in both believers and unbelievers. In the days of Noah God said:

Then the LORD said, “My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years” (Genesis 6:3 NIV).

Prior to the flood, the Lord said that striving or contending with humanity, through His Spirit, would cease. Therefore, it was the Holy Spirit who was restraining sin at that particular time.

The Spirit May Be Working Differently During The Great Tribulation

Since the Holy Spirit of God indwells each and every member of the true church the removal of the Spirit may involve some type of change as to how God deals with the people left on the earth. While the Holy Spirit will indeed work on the earth during the seventieth week of Daniel, it may be that He will operate according to the pattern of the time period before the church began on the Day of Pentecost.

This Is Further Evidence Of A Pre-Tribulation Rapture

If, therefore, the restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2 is identified as the Holy Spirit indwelling the members of the church, the body of Christ, as they preach the gospel, then this is further evidence that the rapture of the church will take place before the start of the seventieth week of Daniel.

Coupled with the other arguments produced in favor of a Pre-Tribulation rapture we have further proof that the church will escape the entire seven year period.

Summary To Question 11

Who Or What Is Restraining The Final Antichrist? (2 Thessalonians 2:6-8)

One of the key issues surrounding the issue of the timing of the rapture of the church concerns the “restrainer” Paul mentioned in his second letter to the Thessalonians. He said the man of sin, the antichrist, could not be revealed until something or someone who is presently restraining sin is taken away. The identity of this restrainer has been debated throughout the history of the church.

Many of those who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture argue that this is a clear reference to the church being removed before the antichrist can come on the scene. The Holy Spirit working through the members of the body of Christ, the New Testament church, as they preach the message of Christ, is the only power which holds back the working of this man of sin. Once the church has been removed at the time of the rapture and the gospel is no longer proclaimed then there is nothing restraining the evil. Antichrist can then appear.

This interpretation has not gone unchallenged. Indeed, there have been many possible candidates offered as the restrainer. So we have no consensus of opinion as to the identity of whom or what is presently keeping the antichrist from appearing to the world.

What makes this issue all the more difficult is that there are a number of things which need answering in determining the identity of the restrainer. For one thing, there is the issue of the description of the restrainer. In one verse Paul describes the restrainer in the neuter gender in Greek. This makes it appear like the restrainer is something impersonal. However, in the next verse the restrainer is described in the masculine gender in Greek which could indicate a personal being. This has added to the difficulty of understanding what Paul meant.

Interestingly, Paul had told the Thessalonians the identity of the restrainer when he was with them. However, nothing is left in any of his writings to inform us as to the identity of this thing or person.

In addition, there has been disagreement as to whether the restrainer is something or someone natural or supernatural. Add to this the issue as to the nature of the restrainer; is it something good or something evil?

As to the exact identity of the restrainer, some say it is human government which is presently holding back the coming of the man of sin. At the time of Paul's writing it was specifically the Roman Empire with its emperor who was restraining the revelation of the man of sin. With the Roman Empire no longer existing, today it is human government in general which restrains antichrist.

The problem with this view is that when antichrist appears he will appear as the head of a large human government. Indeed, it will be the revived Roman Empire. Thus, it does not seem that human government is presently restraining his coming since he will carry out much of his work through the existing governmental structures.

Furthermore, Scripture makes it clear that all government eventually comes from the Lord. He sets up governments, allows them to flourish, then causes them to fall. They have no power unless He grants it.

A number of people see the restraining force as something personal rather than impersonal. There are those who believe it is Michael the archangel who is the restraining force. Yet we find from Scripture Michael, by himself, does not have the power to restrain evil. He must call upon the Lord to combat Satan. Therefore, he does not seem to be the restraining force Paul had in mind.

The best answer seems to be that the restrainer is the Holy Spirit working through the New Testament church. Indeed, only God is capable of restraining evil. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is the member of the Godhead who has the ministry of restraining.

Thus, it is the Holy Spirit, working through the church spreading the message of Christ, which is presently restraining antichrist. Once the church has been removed, then the godly influence of believers proclaiming the message of Christ will allow for the revelation of the antichrist. If this is the correct understanding of the role of the restrainer then the inevitable result is a pre-tribulation rapture. Before this man of sin can be revealed the Holy Spirit who dwells within each believer must be removed from the scene.

This however does not end the work of the Spirit of God. We know that there will be multitudes of people saved during the seven-year tribulation period. We also know that one cannot be saved apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Holy Spirit will indeed work during the time of Great Tribulation.

However, at the beginning of this period of God's wrath, He will be removed with the members of the body of Christ, the church. This will allow the unveiling of the man of sin and the terrible period the earth will undergo. The good news is that it is only of a short duration. Christ will return and then rule in righteousness!

Question 12

Who Are The Twenty-Four Elders? Does Their Identity Help Solve The Timing Of The Rapture?

In the Book of Revelation there are a dozen references to a group of personages known as the twenty-four elders. We first read about them in the fourth chapter where it says the following:

Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads (Revelation 4:4 NIV).

Around the throne of God we find these twenty-four elders. They are described as sitting on twenty-four thrones clothed in garments of white and wearing golden crowns.

Who are they? Are they human or non-human? Does their identity tell us anything about the timing of the rapture of the church?

Generally speaking, there are two basic possibilities as to the identity of the twenty-four elders. They are either angels or they are human beings. We will set forth the key arguments for each position.

The Case For The Twenty-Four Elders Being Human

There are a number of reasons given as to why these twenty-four elders are considered to be humans and not angels. The main arguments for these personages being human are as follows.

1. Elder Is Term For Humans, Not Angels

The term elder can more naturally be understood to refer to human beings rather than angels. Indeed, each time we find this Greek word *presbyteros* used in the New Testament it is a reference to humans, never to angels.

For example, we read the following in Hebrews:

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see. For by it the people of old received God's commendation. (Hebrews 11:1-2 NET).

The words "people of old" translates this same Greek word which is used for the twenty-four elders.

In this case, it obviously refers to humans. Since *all* the other references of this word in the New Testament refer to people, this is a powerful reason to believe that humans are in view in this context in the Book of Revelation.

2. Elders Are Sometimes A Representative Group

There is further evidence that these twenty-four elders represent humans. In a number of instances in the New Testament, elders are representatives of the local churches:

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust (Acts 14:23 NIV).

This seems to give further evidence that humans are in view.

3. They Wear White Robes

The fact that these people wear white robes gives another indication we are dealing with redeemed humans. In the Book of Revelation, the saints are elsewhere said to be dressed in white. We read Jesus saying:

The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels (Revelation 3:5 NIV).

Again, we seem to have humans, not angels, in this description.

4. They Wear Crowns

The fact that these personages wear crowns seems to be more evidence that they are humans, rather than angels. In Scripture, we never find crowns upon the heads of angels. However, we do find humans wearing crowns on a number of occasions. For example, the Bible records Jesus promising a “victors crown” to believers:

Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown (Revelation 2:10 NIV).

5. They Are Singing

The fact that these personages are singing seems to speak of humans rather than angels. Nowhere else in the Bible do we find angels singing while on a number of occasions we do find humans singing. If this does refer to angels, it is the *only* place in Scripture where they are singing.

Which Human Beings Are They?

If the twenty-four elders are human beings, then who are they? Three options have been put forward. They are either people from the nation Israel, a combination of the church and Israel, or the New Testament church alone.

1. Israel

Some think the twenty-four elders represent only Old Testament believers. The number twenty-four is seen as a significant clue to their identity since twenty-four priests, on a rotating basis, would represent thousands of other priests and serve in the Temple (1 Chronicles 24:7-19).

Therefore, it is not impossible that these twenty-four elders in heaven represented these twenty-four priests who served in the Temple of the Lord on the earth.

2. The Church And Israel

There are those which see the twenty-four elders representing the New Testament church *and* the nation of Israel. The twenty-four elders are thus symbolic of the twelve patriarchs plus Jesus' twelve disciples.

The elders were representative of the people of Israel in the Old Testament. In the Book of Exodus, it says the following:

Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb” (Exodus 12:21 NIV).

In the New Testament, we find the elders as representative of the churches. We read about this in the Book of Acts:

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust (Acts 14:23 NIV).

Again, we have the notion that the people are represented by a group of elders.

Furthermore, in the description of the New Jerusalem which comes down from heaven, we find both groups recognized. Scripture says:

It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Revelation 21:12-14 NIV).

Since the elders were representative of the people in both testaments it is consistent to see them as representatives of all believers here in heaven.

3. The New Testament Church

Some people see the twenty-four elders as a reference to the New Testament church. The reasons for this identification are as follows.

Only The Church Is Promised To Sit Upon Thrones

Those from the church are specifically promised to sit upon thrones in the kingdom. We read the Lord saying in Revelation:

To those who are victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne (Revelation 3:21 NIV).

We do not find this specific promise given to anyone else. In fact, we *never* find angels ever sitting on thrones!

Israel Has Not Been Rewarded At This Time

Furthermore, at the time we first encounter the twenty-four elders, the righteous individuals from the Old Testament period have not been raised from the dead and rewarded. This will take place at the end of the tribulation period. Therefore, we do not seem to have them in view in this description of the twenty-four elders.

The Members Of The Church Are Promised Crowns

One of the main reasons as to why the twenty-four elders are assumed to be members of the church is the fact, they are wearing crowns. We also find that members of the New Testament church will wear crowns. Again, in this context in the Book of Revelation we read Jesus saying:

I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown (Revelation 3:11 NIV).

Thus, if the twenty-four elders are humans, it seems best to view them as members of the church who have been taken up into heaven.

The Possible Implications As To The Timing Of The Rapture

If the identification of the church is the correct one, then we seemingly have a strong argument for the rapture occurring *before* the seventieth week of Daniel, the great tribulation. Indeed, these twenty-four elders are in heaven at the very beginning of the seventieth week of Daniel.

Before any of the great judgments occur, these believers are crowned in heaven. This seems to assume that the rapture of the church has taken place and the believers have received their rewards at the judgment seat of Christ.

The Case For Twenty-Four Elders Being Angels

Many people believe the twenty-four elders are humans. Another popular view is that the twenty-four elders is a reference to angels. There are a number of reasons to believe that the twenty-four elders are actually angels rather than humans.

1. Angels Are Called Elders

While the term elder is usually used of humans, there is an instance in the Old Testament where it speaks of angels. We read of this in the Book of Isaiah:

The moon will be dismayed, the sun ashamed; for the LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders—with great glory (Isaiah 24:23 NIV).

In this context, the term “elders” refers to angels.

Since the term is not used exclusively of humans, we should not necessarily assume that humans are in view in the Book of Revelation. Furthermore, the actual Greek word itself does not limit these elders to human beings.

2. The Elders Are Always Grouped With Angels

In the Book of Revelation, whenever we find these elders, we *always* find them grouped with angels. For example, we read:

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God (Revelation 7:11 NIV).

The four living creatures are non-human. This gives further evidence that angels are in view.

3. Angels May Wear Golden Crowns

Next, there is no reason to assume that angels cannot wear golden crowns. In fact, nothing in the Bible prohibits this. While it is true believers wear crowns in heaven, they are not golden crowns.

Furthermore, gold speaks more of rulership rather than redemption or forgiveness of sin. In the various contexts in which we find the twenty-four elders, they are contexts of ruling and reigning rather than any emphasis on forgiveness of sin.

4. Angels Can Sing

As far as angels singing, there is no reason to doubt that they have this ability. Indeed, when Christ was born Luke wrote about the following response from the angels:

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:13,14 NIV).

Here we have recorded the angels praising God at the birth of Jesus Christ. This being the case there is no reason to believe the angels cannot sing.

Which Angels Are They?

If the evidence leads us to believe that the twenty-four elders are angels then who exactly are they. Three main views have been proposed.

Option 1: Angels Representing Priests Of Israel

There is a view that the angels represent Israel, particularly the priests. In the Old Testament, we find the priests serving in twenty-four groups. These elders seemed to have functioned in a priestly way in that they delivered the prayers of the saints in the Heavenly Temple. We read the following:

And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people (Revelation 5:8 NIV).

This could indicate these angels represent the priests of the nation of Israel.

Option 2: Angels Representing Believers From All Ages

There has been the argument that these angels are representative of believers of all ages. For one thing, believers share the throne of the Lord and will reign with Him. We read in the Book of Revelation:

And has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. (Revelation 1:6 NIV).

In doing so, these twenty-four elders, who are angels, wear crowns. Thus, these particular angels may be symbolizing believers which have existed from the beginning of time.

The Problem Of Identifying Them As A Representative Group

The problem with the twenty-four elders representing a group, whether they may be Old Testament priests or believers from all ages, is that there is nothing in the any of the contexts in which they appear that indicates that these personages are representative of any group. In fact, Scripture says the following:

Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?” (Revelation 7:13 NIV).

This verse states that one among the elders asking a question. This seems to rule out the idea that they are representative of a group. Instead, they are individual angels.

Option 3: A Special Group Of Supernatural Beings

There are a number of commentators who believe that the best answer to their identity is to see them as a special group of supernatural beings. Reasons given for this point of view include the following.

To begin with, they are always grouped with angels, never with humans. However, they are always distinguished from the angels they are grouped with. For example, we read the following:

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God (Revelation 7:9-11 NIV).

In this instance, we have three groups of supernatural beings together. The living creatures, another group called "angels," and the twenty-four elders.

Later in the Book of Revelation we again find the twenty-four elders together with the four living creatures. The Bible says:

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants." And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: "Amen, Hallelujah!" (Revelation 19:1-4 NIV).

Once again, we find these twenty-four elders grouped with angels but distinguished from them.

They Perform Functions Only Supernatural Beings Can Perform

The one thing that seems to show that the twenty-four elders are a special class of supernatural beings is that we find them performing the same function as other non-humans beings; offering bowls of incense which are the prayers of the saints. We read:

And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people (Revelation 5:8 NIV).

It appears that the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders are holding these bowls of incense and offering the prayers of God's people. Later, we find this same thing repeated by another angel. The Bible says:

Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God's people, on the golden altar before the throne (Revelation 8:3 NIV).

The description of this act seems to make it clear we are dealing with a special class of supernatural beings.

First, the offering of incense is something that is carried out by supernatural beings, not humans. Furthermore, the text says seems to indicate that these twenty-four elders are offering the prayers of God's people. This seems to distinguish them from God's people or humans.

We also find these twenty-four elders acting as agents of God's revelation to John. One of them answers John's question as to the identity of the people in the white robes:

And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14 NIV).

Notice that this “elder” makes a distinction between the tribulation saints, who are humans, and himself. In other words, he is not one of the ones who were martyred for the testimony of Jesus.

Furthermore, the fact that this particular elder answers John’s question, is consistent with the mission of supernatural beings elsewhere in the Book of Revelation. They function as agents of God’s revelation. For example, we read:

The angel said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place” (Revelation 22:6 NIV).

The duty of bringing divine revelation is something which *only* angels do.

These above reasons have caused many to believe that these mysterious personages are a special class of angels.

Conclusion

If these twenty-four elders are supernatural beings, then their identity does nothing to settle the question of the timing of the rapture of the church. We have to look elsewhere for an answer to this question.

If the twenty-four elders are humans who make up part of the New Testament church, then it seemingly provides concrete proof for a Pre-Tribulation rapture. Indeed, this would place the Christians in heaven during the time of the great tribulation.

However, because the evidence can be read either way we should not attempt to determine the timing of the rapture based solely upon their identity. The correct answer must be decided on other factors.

Summary To Question 12

Who Are The Twenty-Four Elders? Does Their Identity Help Solve The Timing Of The Rapture?

In the Book of Revelation, a group of personages known as the twenty-four elders are mentioned twelve different times. They are described as sitting upon twenty-four thrones and wearing crowns while they are worshipping the Lamb.

These figures play a prominent role in the events recorded in this last Book of Scripture. However, their identity is not clear. There are two major views as to who they are. Some believe they are humans while others assume they are angels. Under each of these categories there are three possible answers as to which humans or which angels they may represent. This particular question looks at the arguments for these personages being human beings.

Those who believe the twenty-four elders in the Book of Revelation are human beings offer the following arguments for why they believe this is the case.

First, the term elder is normally used in Scripture of humans, not angels. In fact, we never find it used of angels in the New Testament. Thus, the natural understanding is that we are dealing with humans. Furthermore, we find that elders are representative of people in both testaments. In the Old Testament, there were elders which represented Israel while in the New Testament we find elders representing the church.

We also find these elders are wearing crowns. Angels are never represented as wearing crowns but humans are said to wear them as rewards for faithful service. This is another indication that humans are in view.

In addition, these elders are dressed in white garments. In the Book of Revelation, we find other saints wearing white robes. This seems to be the color of garments which are worn by believers who have been saved, or redeemed, by the Lord.

Furthermore, these elders are spoken of as being distinct from angels in the Book of Revelation. This seems to make it clear we are dealing with different orders of beings.

These twenty-four elders sing. There is no evidence that angels ever sing, or can sing, while there are a number of occasions where believers are recorded as singing in the Book of Revelation.

If these twenty-four elders are humans, then who are they? Three possible answers have been given.

Some believe they are from the nation of Israel. The priests in Israel operated in groups of twenty-four which represented the rest of the priests. Since the Great Tribulation is a time when the Lord specifically deals with the nation of Israel, these elders may represent this particular people.

Others think they represent both Israel and the church. In other words, all believers from the beginning of time are represented by these twenty-four elders. We find possible evidence of this in the New Jerusalem which has the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles represented by the gates and the walls of this holy city.

A popular idea is that they represent the New Testament church. The church is said to be dressed in white. We also know that members of the church will be rewarded with crowns for faithful service. It is also clear that believers in the church sing praises to the Lord.

If these twenty-four elders are representative of the church, then it would give strong evidence that the rapture of the church will occur before the judgments recorded in the Book of Revelation. This is especially true because we first meet them in chapter four of Revelation, before the judgments associated with the Great Tribulation come upon the earth. They are in heaven during the entire time of tribulation.

If it can be clearly shown that the twenty-four elders are human beings who represent the New Testament church, then it seems to make it plain that the rapture of the church occurs pre-tribulation. However, this idea that the twenty-four elders represent the New Testament church has not gone unchallenged.

There is much discussion over the identity of the twenty-four elders; personages who are mentioned a dozen times in the Book of Revelation. Scripture tells us that these beings sit upon twenty-four thrones, clad in white, wearing golden crowns and sing praises to the Lamb, Jesus Christ. The issue is their identity. Who are these twenty-four elders?

While there have been a number of reasons put forth as to why they may represent human beings, others feel there is much stronger evidence that these personages are angels. They reason as follows.

The title elder, while normally used of human in Scripture, is not limited to them. It is used of angels in the Old Testament. Therefore, we should not assume from their title alone that they are human.

Wearing white garments in the unseen world is not limited to the redeemed saints of God. In the gospels, we are told that angels in white apparel appeared to the women at the tomb of Jesus. White is not a color unique to humans.

A golden crown does not necessarily refer to one who has been redeemed by Christ. Gold usually has connotations of royalty or ruling. The fact that they are sitting upon thrones seems to speak of rulership rather than of redeemed humanity.

There is nothing in Scripture that says angels cannot or do not sing. Indeed, we are specifically told that a multitude of angels praised God at the birth of Christ. Their praise could certainly be understood as singing.

Furthermore, contrary to what some have said, the passage in Revelation does not have them singing about their own redemption. They are singing about the salvation of humanity; not necessarily themselves.

These personages are also linked to the four living creatures mentioned in Revelation. Nobody believes they are human beings.

One of the arguments against these being angels is that humans have not yet been given rulership by the Lord. This only occurs at the end of the millennium, not the beginning. Therefore, they cannot represent the church.

If they are angels, then they could be either angels representing Israel, believers from all ages, or a special group of angels.

It is possible that this group represents Israel. In the Old Testament, the priesthood was represented by twenty-four priests who continually served in the temple. Yet, there is no evidence they are representative of any particular group.

Some feel these angels symbolize believers from every age. Again, there is nothing in the context that indicates that these personages are representative of a larger group. Furthermore, there is one passage which has one out of the group of elders answering a question. This shows we are dealing with individuals, not representatives of some group.

There is evidence that seems to show that this is a special group of angels. As mentioned, they are linked with the four living creatures which everyone agrees are angelic creatures, not human beings. However, though they are always associated with other angels each time they are mentioned in the Book of Revelation, these twenty-four elders are also distinguished from these angels. Thus, they are always linked with angels but distinguished from them.

Furthermore, we find these elders performing duties which only angels can perform, offering the prayers of the people to God.

In addition, these twenty-four elders act as agents of divine revelation. This is something we find angels doing elsewhere in the Book of Revelation as well as elsewhere in Scripture. Humans are never given this responsibility. It seems that twenty-four individual angels are in view when Scripture speaks of the twenty-four elders.

If these personages are indeed a special class of angels rather than human beings, then their identity has nothing specifically to teach us about the timing of the rapture of the church. Other evidence needs to be brought forward to answer this question.

Question 13

Does Paul Statement About Wishing To Attain The Resurrection Of The Dead Give Evidence Of A Pre-Tribulation Rapture? (Philippians 3:11)

There is a passage in the writings of the Apostle Paul which has been difficult for many to understand. In his letter to the Philippians, he wrote about desiring to “attain” the resurrection from the dead. Paul expressed it this way:

I want to know Christ--yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:11 NIV).

In what sense did Paul want to attain the resurrection from the dead? Interestingly, the best answer to this question may give additional proof for the doctrine of a pre-tribulation rapture. The options are as follows.

Option 1: Paul Did Not Express Doubt In This Passage

Some solve the problem of the alleged doubt by Paul by assuming this is not what he said. For example, the New American Standard Bible translates the text in this manner:

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:10,11 NASB 2020).

This translation “in order that I may attain” takes away any uncertainty in Paul’s words. However, it does not do justice to what Paul wrote.

Indeed, every other usage of this phrase in the New Testament clearly expresses some degree of doubt. For example, we read.

Since the harbor was not suitable for spending the winter, the majority was in favor of putting to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, where they could spend the winter. It was a harbor of Crete, facing southwest and northwest (Acts 27:12 NIV).

Here the same phrase is translated “on the chance.” Obviously, this shows doubt.

When Paul himself used this same phrase in writing to the Romans it clearly expressed doubt in his mind:

In my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you (Romans 1:10 NIV).

In this instance, the Greek phrase *ei pos* is translated “by God’s will.” Clearly there is doubt in his mind. Therefore, we cannot solve this problem by translating away the doubt which Paul expressed. He was expressing doubts about something. The question is, “What was Paul uncertain of?”

Option 2: Paul Had A Moment Of Human Weakness

Since Paul does communicate actual doubts here, there are those who argue that it was the human side of Paul that was expressing itself. Although he knew intellectually that he would be among those who would be raised from the dead his personal faith was somewhat weak at that moment.

Some go as far as to say that this was a real concern. Unless Paul remained faithful, there was the possibility of not participating in the resurrection of the believing dead. The following statement of Paul to the Corinthians is often used as another example to support this idea:

No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Corinthians 9:27 NIV).

This passage also shows Paul had certain doubts. He was concerned he might become disqualified if he did not remain faithful. This term “disqualified” has been understood to mean that Paul thought that he might not be among the believers at the time of judgment.

Neither of these answers is satisfactory. While we can agree that Paul was not superhuman or sinless attributing a lapse of faith to him does not seem to be the best way of resolving his statement of doubt in Philippians 3:11. A better answer needs to be found.

In addition, Paul’s statement to the Corinthians should not be seen as a lack of faith, or conviction, in what he believed about his own future resurrection. Indeed, his concern was not his salvation; that was secure. His concern was for any rewards he would receive for godly behavior *after* he became a Christian. Paul wanted to remain faithful so that one day he would hear the words of Jesus, “Well done, faithful servant.”

Option 3: Paul Was Expressing Humility In His Statement

One popular view sees Paul’s statement not as one of doubt but as one of modesty or humility. Instead of confidently proclaiming his hope in the resurrection of believers he was humbly expressing this desire. While Paul firmly believed that he would be counted among the believers at the time of the resurrection he did not boldly proclaim it in this passage.

Some argue that the Philippians had members of their congregation who embraced an idea of perfectionism; that they had already attained to some spiritually mature level. To refute this, Paul made this statement of humility.

This answer, while popular, does not seem to be the best solution. The statement of Paul is not one of humility but one of doubt. There is a huge difference between humbly expecting to be raised from the dead and not being certain you will be raised. Paul’s statement was one of uncertainty, not humility.

Option 4: Paul Doubted He Would Be Included In The General Resurrection

Some think that this doubt Paul expressed refers to the time of the general resurrection of the dead. Paul was expressing a desire to attain the general resurrection of the dead with the believers rather than being among the lost. In other words, on Judgment Day, his hope was to be with them.

However, the problem which arises with this interpretation is the note of uncertainty, “if somehow I may.” This is completely contrary to his other statements where he always included himself among those who would rise from the dead with the believers. For example, he wrote to the Romans:

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:31-32 NIV).

He wrote to Timothy about his confidence that the Lord would guard or keep him until that Day:

That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day (2 Timothy 1:12 NIV).

There is no doubt whatsoever that Paul believed he would be included with the resurrection of deceased believers if he died before the Lord returned. Thus, this interpretation does not prove very satisfying.

Option 5: Paul Was Uncertain He Would Be Part Of The First Resurrection

There are many interpreters who do not believe that one general resurrection will take place for everyone at the same time. Instead there will be separate resurrections for believers and unbelievers.

Consequently, a common view sees these particular words by Paul as a reference to the resurrection for believers only. This is also called the first resurrection. Thus, his hope was to be part of this resurrection rather than be included in the resurrection with the unbelievers.

Again, we have the problem of Paul expressing doubt about being among the company of believers who are raised from the dead. As we just emphasized, there is nothing whatsoever in any of Paul's writings that he had any uncertainty about being raised from the dead with the other believers if Christ did not come back during his lifetime.

Consequently, while it seems fair to conclude that Paul is expressing doubt about something, this doubt cannot be about the possibility that he will not be raised from the dead, whether through a general resurrection of all people or the first resurrection which consisted of believers only. If Paul did not doubt that he would experience a physical resurrection then there must be something else in which he has doubts about.

Option 6: Paul Was Speaking Of A Spiritual Resurrection

If it is not a physical resurrection in which Paul is expressing doubts, then perhaps a spiritual resurrection is in view. There are those which think that this is a reference to a spiritual resurrection. Paul wanted to attain in this life some type of spiritual identification with Christ in His resurrection. In other words, he wanted to attain experiential knowledge of the resurrected Christ.

This explanation has never been very popular. Indeed, it is difficult to see how this statement could refer to anything different than a physical resurrection.

Furthermore, elsewhere Paul says that all believers presently partake in the resurrection life of Christ. For example, he wrote to the Ephesians:

[God the Father] made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:5 NIV).

In addition, Romans 6:3-11 clearly states that believers presently experience the resurrected life in Christ. Thus, Paul would not encourage believers to obtain something we have already obtained. He emphasized that there is not any way in which a believer can lose his or her resurrection life in Christ.

Option 7: Paul Was Speaking About Attainment Of Rewards

There are those who argue that Paul's concern was rewards, not participation in the resurrection. Those who present this argument often do so because none of the other options seemingly make sense. Therefore, though there is no specific evidence that Paul meant this here, it is still the best way to understand his words.

However, this is not the way to go about answering a Bible difficulty. There must be some evidence that Paul had this in mind if we want to promote this interpretation. Yet there is nothing in Paul's words which would suggest this.

Option 8: Paul Was Teaching A Partial Rapture

There are those who believe that this statement refers to a partial rapture. The argument says that Paul expressed doubt that he would be among those caught up to meet the Lord at the time the church was translated into heaven. He wanted to remain faithful so that he would be translated or raptured with the mature or spiritual believers.

However, there is nothing in the writings of Paul that gives any indication that only part of the body of Christ was going to be raptured or that he had any doubts as to whether he would be with the Lord at that time. The entire body of Christ will meet the Lord in the air at the time the church is caught up to meet Him. The participation in the rapture-event is not based upon our good works or spiritual maturity.

Option 9: He Was Uncertain Whether He Would Be Alive When The Rapture Of The Church Takes Place

The best answer seems to be a reference to Paul's desire to be included in the rapture of the church with the living believers. Indeed, Paul is concerned about attaining something while he is still alive; not something which will occur after his death. The rapture only concerns living believers.

Thus, his doubt consisted of the fact that he didn't know whether he would still be alive when this event took place. In other words, Paul did not know whether he would be part of the living believers or the dead believers when Christ comes for His church. He was confident that he would be with the believers but he had doubt as to which group, he would be a part of.

There are a number of reasons as to why this interpretation makes good sense. We can list them as follows.

Paul Uses A Special Word For Resurrection

To begin with, the term Paul used for the resurrection is found only here in the New Testament. It is the Greek word *exanastasis* which literally means "out resurrection." The usual word for resurrection is *anastasis*. It is used forty times in the New Testament, and with only one exception, it always refers to the resurrection from the dead.

The use of this unique term further demonstrates that Paul did not have doubts about his own resurrection for if he did, we would expect him to use the normal word for resurrection. The fact that he used a special word shows that his doubts were not about being raised with other believers.

Some think it is unwise to attach any special meaning to this unique term. They argue that it is possible that Paul was merely using a different word for resurrection for merely literary or stylistic reasons. In other words, Paul used this unique word to emphasize his point with greater vividness.

However, there is a better explanation. Since he used the usual term for resurrection *anastasis* in the previous verse, there may be a special emphasis he is making with this particular word. What is this emphasis?

The answer could be the rapture of the church. It is interesting to note is that this same word is used by the Greek writers Hippocrates and Polybius in the sense of “rising in the air.” This fits very well with the idea of the rapture of the church. Consequently the word itself may give some evidence that Paul is referring to the rapture of the church. Yet, there is more to support this idea.

The Rapture Was Prominent In His Writings

There is also the fact that Paul emphasizes the rapture of the church a number of times in his writings. In doing so, he mentioned his uncertainty as to whether he would be in the company of the living when the event took place. It was his genuine hope that he be included in this event while he was still alive though he had no assurance that this would be the case. Whenever he personally spoke about the rapture, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-58, he allowed the possibility that he would be among those who were alive rather than those who had died. He was uncertain as to which group he would be a part of. This uncertainty is again expressed here.

The Fact That Paul Expressed Some Doubt When He Wrote To The Philippians

Therefore, the uncertainty of whether Paul would be among the living or the dead when the rapture takes place fits well with what he wrote to the Philippians. As we have mentioned, the Greek text reads *ei pos* which translates, “if by any means.” This is a phrase which expresses uncertainty.

Seemingly, the only answer that makes sense is that Paul is referring to the rapture here and his participation in it. His uncertainty is whether he will be alive when the Lord returns for His church at the time of the rapture. Any doubt which Paul has is concerning the circumstances of his resurrection; it is not about the fact of his resurrection. Of this, Paul had no doubt.

All of the factors placed together strongly indicate that Paul’s hope expressed here to the Philippians was the hope to be included in the rapture of the church. According to Paul, this catching up to meet the Lord could happen at any moment. A few verses later Paul would write:

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:20-21 NIV).

Paul was eagerly awaiting the Savior. This eagerness strongly indicates that the Savior could come at any moment. However, if Paul was expecting to go through the seven-year tribulation period before the Lord returns it is hard to explain his earnest expectation and eagerness. On the other hand, the idea of an “any moment rapture” fits perfectly with what Paul stated here.

Summary To Question 13

Does Paul Statement About Wishing To Attain The Resurrection Of The Dead Give Evidence Of A Pre-Tribulation Rapture? (Philippians 3:11)

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians, he emphasized his desire to attain to the resurrection of the dead. This difficult statement has led to a number of different interpretations. What exactly did Paul mean by this phrase “attain to the resurrection?” Was he uncertain he would be with believers at the time of the resurrection? A number of answers have been suggested.

There are those who see no issue here. One option is to translate the verse in such a way where it does not express any uncertainty. Yet this does not do justice to the meaning of the phrase. There is definitely something which Paul was uncertain about.

Another option is to see a lack of faith on Paul's behalf. While he knew he would be part of the resurrected believers he showed his human side in making this statement.

Others actually believe Paul meant what he said, he was concerned about being with the believers on resurrection day. However neither of these options solves the problem. Paul was always confident that he would be with the believers at the time of judgment. Any concern he expressed was for rewards he may or may not receive for faithfulness, it was not for his eternal salvation.

A popular view is to see this as Paul expressing humility, not doubt. While he was certain he would be part of the resurrected believers, in this particular instance he humbly expressed that desire rather than confidently stating it. The problem with this answer is that Paul's statement is one of doubt, not humility.

What then did Paul have doubts about? The general resurrection is one option. It is argued that Paul wanted to be among the believers when the general resurrection of the dead took place. However, this is completely contrary to everything Paul wrote. He had no doubt whatsoever that he would be with the believers.

Some say this refers to the first resurrection, the resurrection for believers only. Again, there is the problem of Paul expressing doubt as to whether he will attain this resurrection.

Since doubts about a physical resurrection do not seem to be in view, some argue for a spiritual resurrection. Yet, this does not work because Paul taught that believers already participate in the resurrected life of Christ.

Another answer is that Paul was speaking of attaining rewards. But nothing in this context fits this. Still others see this as a referring to the partial rapture of the church. Again, nowhere do we find the New Testament teaching that only certain spiritual believers will be included in the rapture.

The best answer seems to be that Paul was referring to the rapture of the church. His doubt consisted of the fact that he did not know if he would be alive when this event took place. In other instances when he wrote of the rapture, Paul tentatively categorized himself among the living when the believers would be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

Since Paul did not know when this event would take place, he could rightly express the hope that it would happen while he was still living but he could not be certain that this would be the case.

The fact that he used a special word here for resurrection could be a clue that he was referring to the rapture. The Greek word *exanastasis* means "out resurrection." It is found only here in the entire New Testament. Other Greek writers use this term in the sense of "rising up in the air." Therefore, the very word Paul uses may give us a clue as to what he had in mind.

Furthermore, we know that Paul was certainly eagerly waiting for the coming of the Lord. This was his expressed hope. The fact that he eagerly anticipated the Lord's coming is strong evidence for the rapture occurring before the seventieth week of Daniel begins; the last seven years before the return of Christ.

If Paul expected to go through the Great Tribulation, it is hard to see how he could eagerly be anticipating the coming of Christ seeing that the entire church would have to endure all the hardships of that unprecedented period of God's wrath. Thus, the best answer to this difficulty appears to be that Paul was expressing his hope; the hope that he would be upon the earth during that time the church would be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

Question 14

Does The Greek Text Of Revelation 5:8-10, As Translated By The King James Version, Teach A Pre-Tribulation Rapture?

Yes, it does. Some people think the question of the timing of the rapture is actually solved by a passage in the fifth chapter of the Book of Revelation. While the great tribulation is occurring on the earth, there are twenty-four elders in heaven singing a song about God's redemption or salvation. In the King James Version, it says:

And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four *and* twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth (Revelation 5:8-10 KJV).

These elders sing that God has redeemed "us." This means that the twenty-four elders are part of the redeemed company in heaven who are praising God for forgiving *their* sins.

The New King James Version says something similar. It reads:

Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:8-10 NKJV).

Again, we have the twenty-four elders praising God for *their* redemption out from among the various people who live upon the earth. In other words, they are part of the New Testament church.

This passage, in these translations, gives seemingly irrefutable evidence of a Pre-Tribulation rapture. Indeed, while the great tribulation is taking place upon the earth the Christians in heaven are praising God for redeeming *them* out from among the rest of humanity. Since the Old Testament saints have not been raised at this time it can only refer to believers in the New Testament church.

Does this settle the issue of the timing of the rapture? No, it does not.

The Issue Of The Correct Greek Text

The issue boils down to the correct Greek text to use to translate these verses. In the existing manuscripts at this chapter in the Book of Revelation there are variations in the text. The Greek text from which the *King James Version* as well as the *New King James Version* is translated has the twenty-four elders singing a song about how God redeemed "us."

In other words, they are part of the company of believers in heaven. Since their song is occurring in heaven while the great tribulation is occurring on the earth it seems to follow that they have been raptured or translated before this seven-year period. Thus, this gives strong evidence of a Pre-tribulation rapture.

Other Manuscripts Read Differently

Yet this is not the end of the story. Other Greek manuscripts read differently in this passage. Instead of the twenty-four elders singing about how the Lord redeemed “us” they are singing about how the Lord redeemed “them.” For example, the New International Version says:

And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God’s people. And they sang a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God members of every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth (Revelation 5:8-10 NIV).

Notice the difference. This translation, which is similar to almost all other modern translations, has the elders singing about how the Lord redeemed people or saints from every tribe and made “them” a kingdom and priests. This is in contrast to the other Greek text where the twenty-four elders sang a song about God redeeming “us.”

So, the question is, “Are the elders singing about God redeeming other people, “them,” or are they singing about God redeeming “us.”

This Passage Should Not Be Used As The Final Determiner

When all is said and done, we should not use this passage in the Book of Revelation as the final determiner of the timing of the rapture. While it is certainly possible that the Greek text behind the *King James Version* and the *New King James Version* is the correct text, and that these elders are singing about the Lord redeeming “us,” there is still some uncertainty on the matter.

We should also note that most Greek scholars do *not* accept the reading of the text behind the *King James Version* and *New King James Version*. Indeed, most Greek students who believe in a Pre-tribulation rapture do not use this passage to support their belief. They think there is insufficient evidence to accept the reading of the KJV and the NKJV as the authentic text.

On the other hand, they believe there is sufficient evidence elsewhere for the rapture of the church occurring before the great tribulation. Yet they do not use this verse to prove their case.

Summary To Question 14

Does The Greek Text Of Revelation 5:8-10, As Translated By The King James Version, Teach A Pre-Tribulation Rapture?

In the fifth chapter of the Book of Revelation there is a passage about the twenty-four elders sitting on thrones in heaven and singing a song about the redeemed. The identity of the twenty-four elders is debatable. However, the way in which the King James Version (KJV), along with the New King James Version (NKJV), translates this verse seems to unmistakably show that these twenty-four elders are part of the New Testament church.

Both translations have these twenty-four elders singing about how the Lord has redeemed “us” to God and made “us” a kingdom of priests to Him. This, it is argued, places the twenty-four elders as members of the New Testament church. If this is the case, then the rapture or translation of the church has occurred before the time of the Great Tribulation strikes the earth since they sing this song in heaven while the tribulation is occurring.

While these translations seemed to convincingly show that the church will not experience the Great Tribulation, there is a problem as to what the Greek text says in this passage. The KJV and the NKJV are, for the most part, by themselves in translating the verses in this manner because they use a Greek text which almost all other translations do not. In other words, the issue is not with how the Greek text is translated; the issue is what Greek text should be used as a basis for the translation.

In these other translations, the twenty-four elders are singing about how the Lord redeemed “saints” or “people” to God without identifying who these saints or people are. Furthermore, the twenty-four elders place these redeemed saints in a different category than themselves. They refer to “us” and “them.” Consequently, we do not have evidence that that the church has been translated into heaven based upon the words of the song.

Which translation should be used here? A number of points need to be made to answer this question. The Greek text used in the KJV and NKJV translations is used by a minority of Greek scholars and New Testament textual critics. This is a fact beyond any doubt. While this does not solve the issue as to what Greek text should be used, it is important to note that these two translations are in the minority. This being the case, it is probably wise that this passage should not be used, by itself, in an attempt to settle the issue as to the timing of the rapture of the church or as the last word on the subject.

Question 15

When Jesus Spoke Of One Person Being Taken And Another Left Behind Was He Speaking Of The Rapture? (Matthew 24:40-42, Luke 17:34-36)

There are two instances in the gospels, one in Matthew and the other in Luke, where Jesus talks about two people who are together. He tells us that one is suddenly taken and the other one is left.

Matthew records Jesus' teaching about what will occur when He returns. The Lord put it this way:

Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come (Matthew 24:40-42 NIV).

In Luke's gospel, we have the following illustration by Jesus:

I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left (Luke 17:34-35 NIV).

Are these references to the rapture of the church? Is the one "taken" in the rapture removed from the earth to be with the Lord or does the idea of taken have another meaning in these contexts? What is Jesus trying to teach us here?

Believers are divided as to what these passages are telling us. We can make the following observations about how these passages are interpreted.

Option 1: The People Are Taken In The Rapture: Others Are Left Behind For Judgment

There is the view that these are references to the rapture of the church. Those "taken" are caught up to meet the Lord in the air. The ones not taken are left behind for God's judgment.

Interestingly, examples can be found of Pre-Tribulation, Mid-Tribulation, and Post-Tribulation writers holding to this view. However, Pre-Tribulationists do not usually believe this refers to the rapture of the church although there are some exceptions.

Arguments for this referring to the rapture are as follows.

Jesus Illustrates How Christians Are Removed From The Coming Judgment

In the Olivet Discourse, in Matthew 24:4-35, Jesus speaks of the coming judgments associated with the "Day of the Lord." However, a change of subject is now introduced at verse 36. Jesus will explain *when* these judgments begin. They can happen at any time. In other words, it is imminent.

He then gives examples of what will take place immediately before the judgments associated with the Day of the Lord begin; the believers in Christ will be *removed* from the earth.

This is a reference to the rapture of the church. The rapture is thus illustrated with the two people together, where one is taken in the rapture, and the other left for the judgment which will come upon the earth.

It Is Consistent With Other References To The Rapture

There is also the argument that this reference is consistent with other passages which clearly speak of the rapture. The Bible refers to people being “caught up” to meet the Lord:

After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:17 NIV).

While this is not the exact same Greek word that Jesus used it has the same idea. Those taken away are caught away to meet Him.

Jesus Illustrated The Taking Away With The Flood

It is also argued that Jesus illustrated the salvation, or removal, which the rapture brings with what happened to the family of Noah. In the same context, Jesus gave this illustration:

As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:37-39 NIV).

In the reference to the flood, it is argued that the ones taken away, or removed, are the people taken away *from* the coming judgment. They were saved from the flood by being taken in the ark. Those left behind were left behind on the earth for the judgment of the flood. In the same manner, Jesus illustrated that the one taken will be rescued from judgment while the one left will face the coming judgment.

Jesus Told The Believers To Watch

In addition, we find in this context, Jesus telling the believers to “watch:”

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come (Matthew 24:42 NIV)

The fact that the Lord told the believers to “watch” sounds more like the rapture of the church is in view rather than His Second Coming.

These reasons have caused people to see Jesus’ illustrations of one taken and another left to be a reference to the removal of believers at the rapture.

Option 2: Those Are Taken To Judgment: Those Left Behind Enter The Kingdom

Another view has the ones taken as being taken to judgment. The ones left behind are left to enter the kingdom of God. While these illustrations may sound like they are a reference to the rapture of the church, it is argued that they are not. Instead the examples refer to the Second Coming of Christ when the Lord Himself divides humanity into the sheep and the goats. Those taken are the goats and they are taken to judgment. The sheep are left to enter the kingdom. Therefore, the one taken is not a believer in Jesus Christ but rather an unbeliever who is taken away to face the Judge.

The Context Of Matthew

It is argued that this is further confirmed when the contexts are examined. Both contexts are contexts of judgment. In the section of Matthew, Jesus is speaking of judgment. In fact, the previous illustration the Lord used concerned the time of Noah and the judgment of the flood.

Contrary to how some understand Jesus' illustration of Noah and the flood, those taken were taken away by the *judgment* in the flood. They were not taken to meet the Lord. The ones not taken in judgment, Noah's family, were left to populate the new world. In the same manner, the ones "left behind" when the Lord returns will enter God's millennial kingdom.

The Context In Luke Is Also Of Judgment

The context in Luke is also that of judgment. Indeed, when the disciples asked Him exactly where these people were to be taken Jesus said it would be a place of judgment:

"Where, Lord?" they asked. He replied, "Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather" (Luke 17:37 NIV).

These ones who are "taken" would be brought to a place where dead bodies are gathered. Obviously, this speaks of judgment, not salvation or deliverance. Thus, the response of Jesus to the question of where these people are taken shows that they are taken to a place of judgment.

Jesus Taught This Same Truth In Parables

This idea of the unrighteous being taken to judgment fits well with the teaching in Jesus' parables. For example, in the parable of the wheat and weeds we find that the unbelievers are taken to judgment. In fact, Jesus described the meaning of the parable of the wheat and the weeds as follows:

As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear (Matthew 13:40-43 NIV).

Notice the weeds are gathered up and *taken* to judgment while the righteous are *left* to enter the kingdom.

The Unrighteous Are Taken Away

In this instance, the unrighteous are taken away to judgment while the righteous are left to enter the kingdom of God. This, it is claimed, gives further evidence that Jesus' illustration of the two people means that one of them is taken to judgment while the one left behind enters the kingdom.

The Context Of Matthew Deals With Israel

There is one more point which is often brought up by those who do not see the rapture of the church in these illustrations. They contend that the Olivet Discourse is aimed at Jews and the nation of Israel, not the New Testament church. Since the church is not the subject of Jesus' teaching then the rapture could not be in view. Of course, not everyone agrees with this assessment. This includes some who hold to the Pre-tribulation view.

Others believe the Olivet Discourse is directed to the church and thus it is possible for this to be an illustration of the rapture.

Conclusion

Either view is possible. However, a good case can be made that they are illustrations of the rapture of the church. This is especially true since we have the Lord, in this context, instructing the believers to "watch." This assumes that the event can happen at any moment. Indeed, "watching" and "being ready" are terms associated

with the rapture, not the Second Coming. Thus, it seems like Jesus is illustrating the rapture of the church in these two examples.

Summary To Question 15

When Jesus Spoke Of One Person Being Taken And Another Left Behind, Was He Speaking Of The Rapture? (Matthew 24:40-42, Luke 17:34-36)

In two different passages when speaking of His coming back to the earth, Jesus gave illustrations of a time when one person would be taken and another person left behind. There is a question as to what these verses refer. Does this refer to the rapture of the church? Are these ones taken up to meet the Lord in the air at the rapture of the church? Or are the ones who taken brought to a place of judgment while the ones left behind enter the kingdom? This is an area of dispute.

There are people from each rapture point of view which believe this is a reference to the time Jesus comes in the air for the believers, the translation of the church. However, those who hold the pre-tribulation view do not usually interpret it this way.

Those which see this as a specific reference to the rapture offer a number of arguments to support their belief.

The Greek term Jesus used, *paralambano*, is sometimes thought to be a technical term for the rapture. The description of Jesus as to what happens to the one taken is similar to what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about the same event. The believers are taken away to meet the Lord. The ones left behind face the judgment of the Lord.

In addition, the illustration Jesus used of Noah's flood is further evidence of this. Those taken away at the time of the flood were removed from the earth before the wrath of God struck. Those left faced the judgment. In the same manner, those taken away in the rapture are rescued from God's wrath after the Great Tribulation.

As mentioned, not everyone sees these illustrations as referring to the rapture. There are a number of reasons as to why this is the case. For one thing, the Greek word *paralambano* is not a technical term for the rapture of the church or being taken away to safety. Indeed, it is used in some contexts as being taken away to judgment. For example, the gospels use it to refer to the soldiers leading Jesus away to Pilate. Obviously, it is not always a technical expression for taking someone away to safety.

There is something else which should be noted. In each of these instances, where Jesus used the illustration of one taken and other left, the context is one of judgment rather than deliverance. We find that the judgment of the flood, as well as the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, is found immediately preceding these references. Thus, the context does not favor seeing these as references to the rapture but rather to the Second Coming.

Jesus' illustration of Noah and the flood should not be viewed as a reference to the rapture. Those taken were taken in judgment while those left behind after the judgment populated the new world. Thus, "taken" does not have the idea of deliverance or salvation. This truth is further illustrated with Jesus' parables. In the parable of the wheat and the weeds, and the parable of the dragnet, the evil ones are separated from the good and are taken away to judgment. Those who are left enter the kingdom of God.

Therefore, these illustrations of one person taken and another person left are not referring to the rapture of the church but rather to the Second Coming of Christ when He comes back to judge those upon the earth. Those taken are brought to judgment while the righteous are left to enter the kingdom. Since it is not clear that the rapture of the church is in view in these two illustrations, they should not be used to establish the timing of this coming event.

Question 16

Will Old Testament Believers Be Raised At The Rapture Of The Church?

The Bible says that at the time of the rapture the Lord will raise the dead. Paul wrote:

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:16 NIV).

One of the important questions about the rapture has to do with the participants of this resurrection. Will every believer from the time of Adam be raised from the dead or will the resurrection, which occurs at the rapture, be limited to New Testament believers, the church?

The Case For Old Testament Believers Being Raised At The Rapture

Many people think that the resurrection which occurs at the time of the rapture of the church will include all believers who have died from the time of Adam. In other words, it will consist of raising Old Testament believers as well as New Testament believers. Those who argue that the Old Testament believers will be raised at the time of the rapture usually argue on the following lines.

1. There Is Only One General Resurrection Of The Dead

The amillennial point of view, which says there is no literal thousand- year reign of Christ upon the earth, believes that when Jesus Christ returns, Post-Tribulation, there will be a general resurrection of all the dead. In fact, this is what Jesus Himself taught. He said:

Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment (John 5:28,29 NIV).

Therefore, the belief that Jesus Christ will return some seven years before His Second Coming, and then raise a portion of the believing dead, does not fit that which the Lord Himself taught. Jesus taught that the dead will be raised at the *last day*. This includes everybody.

We read about this resurrection in Daniel:

At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book--will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:1-2 NIV).

The Bible says that all the dead, righteous and unrighteous, will be raised together.

This view, that the resurrection at the rapture will include all of the Old Testament saints, as well as New Testament believers who have died, is mainly held by those which do not see a distinction between the nation Israel and the New Testament church. They are the “one people of God” who have existed from the beginning.

2. Scripture Never Uses The Phrase Rapture “Of The Church”

There is further evidence for this. When speaking of the rapture we never find the phrase “the rapture of the church.” The word “church” has to be read into the text. Thus, there is not necessarily any reason to limit those participating as being limited to the New Testament church.

These reasons have caused many to see the dead who are raised at the time of the rapture as including *all* of the righteous dead; not merely those who are members of the church.

The Case Against Old Testament Believers Being Raised At The Rapture

While there are those who believe that all dead saints will be raised immediately before the rapture of the church there is evidence that the resurrection of the dead at the time of the rapture will *not* include the Old Testament saints but instead will be limited to the New Testament believers. We note the following.

1. The Church Is A Unique Group

The New Testament church is a unique group of believers. They are not to be confused with those from Old Testament Israel or the believers who preceded them. God’s plan includes working with a nation, Israel, as well as with those who trust Him from every nation, the New Testament church. Unless these distinctions are kept in mind there will be confusion on the subject.

The Pre-Tribulation perspective thus sees the church, the “bride” of Christ, as distinct from Israel which is called the “wife” of the Lord. The bride of Christ meets the Lord in the air. This includes those who have died since the church age began at the Day of Pentecost.

2. Those Raised Are “In Christ”

While it is true that we never find the phrase “the rapture of the church” in referring to the catching up of the believers Scripture says that those caught up to meet the Lord at the rapture, or translation of the church, are “in Christ.” This is a technical term for the New Testament church. Paul wrote:

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel’s voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:16 CSB).

It is the dead “in Christ” which shall be raised. This limits the resurrection to members of the New Testament church. The Old Testament believers are never said to be “in Christ.”

Furthermore, since it is only living believers which are caught up at the time of the rapture, by definition, this would *not* include Old Testament saints. There is no question about this. The issue we are looking at concerns which of the dead are raised at the time of the rapture. Is it all believers, from all time, or only New Testament believers?

3. There Is A Resurrection Order

The Apostle Paul indicated that the resurrection of the dead would be according to a certain order. He wrote:

For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward, at his coming, those who belong to Christ (1 Corinthians 15:22,23 CSB).

According to this passage, the resurrection of the dead is in stages. Jesus Christ is first, then those who belong to Christ. The Pre-Tribulation view holds that New Testament believers will be raised at the rapture of the church.

The Old Testament Saints Will Be Raised At The Second Coming

The Old Testament saints will be raised later; at the time of the Second Coming of Christ. At that same time, the tribulation saints, or martyrs, will also be raised. We read of this in the Book of Revelation:

Then I saw thrones and seated on them were those who had been given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. These had not worshiped the beast or his image and had refused to receive his mark on their forehead or hand. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4 NET).

The dead come to life at this time. Note that there is a distinction between those on the thrones and those who had died during the great tribulation. The phrase, “those who are on the thrones” likely describes the New Testament church. We find that they are kept distinct from the tribulation saints. They have *already* been raised from the dead when the people who were martyred for Jesus during the tribulation are raised. In other words, we have two distinct groups.

The passage we earlier considered, Daniel 12, teaches that the Old Testament believers will be raised at this time also. This is *after* the Second Coming of Christ.

Therefore, the first resurrection consists of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and then those who follow Him. This includes the New Testament church at the rapture, then the tribulation saints, and the Old Testament saints at His Second Coming.

Consequently, we should not assume that all believers are raised at the same time. They are not.

Summary To Question 16

Will Old Testament Believers Be Raised At The Rapture Of The Church?

The Bible says that when the rapture takes place believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. At that time there will also be the resurrection of dead believers.

However, there is a question as to which believers Scripture is talking about when it speaks of the dead being raised. Is it every believer from the beginning of time or is it limited to the New Testament church?

Some people think this refers to the raising from the dead of every single believer from the beginning of time. This, of course, would refer to Old Testament believers as well as the New Testament believers. Those who hold this perspective usually see no distinction between the nation of Israel and the New Testament church. They believe the church is the “new Israel.”

The resurrection of the dead at the rapture is the resurrection which Jesus spoke about; the one which would happen at “the last day.” Every believer will be raised and they will all return to the earth with Jesus.

Furthermore, Scripture never uses the phrase “the rapture of the church” when referring to the translation of believers. Thus, it does not limit those who are raised to the New Testament church.

Others say that this resurrection is limited to the dead “in Christ.” Thus, the fact that the phrase rapture of the church is not specifically used in the New Testament is not really an issue. “In Christ” is another way of saying the church.

Paul made the point that it is the dead “in Christ” which rise first. They are the only ones who are raised from the dead at the time of the rapture of the church. “In Christ” is a specific term which refers to the New Testament church.

The church did not begin until the day of Pentecost. Previous to this, the Lord was working through the nation Israel. These Old Testament believers are not raised until the end of the Great Tribulation because they have a different relationship to the Lord than the church, the bride of Christ. Thus, the order of resurrection is Christ, the New Testament church, and then the Old Testament saints.

Question 17

Will The People Who Have Rejected The Gospel Before The Rapture Takes Place Have Another Chance To Believe After It Has Occurred?

Assuming a Pre-Tribulation rapture, one of the questions which is often asked concerns those who heard the gospel before the rapture of the church occurred. What will happen to those individuals who hear the gospel, reject the message of Jesus Christ, but then are still alive when the rapture takes place?

This Is A Non-Issue For Many

This particular question is not an issue for many people since they believe the rapture of the church will occur immediately before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to the earth. Therefore, *all* of the believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air leaving only unbelievers upon the earth awaiting judgment.

For those who believe there will be an interval between the time of the rapture of the saints and the Second Coming of Christ they answer the question in a number of ways.

There Will Be Believers In The Great Tribulation

We know that there will be believers alive during the great tribulation period, whether they believe after a Pre-Trib, Mid-Trib, or Pre-Wrath rapture. Consequently, these believers must come from somewhere.

Option 1: Those Which Heard Before Will Not Get A Second Chance

There are some Bible students who think that people who have heard the good news of Christ before the rapture of the church will not get a second chance to believe after the church is caught up to meet the Lord. They usually base this belief upon the following passage:

This man will come to do the work of Satan with counterfeit power and signs and miracles. He will use every kind of evil deception to fool those on their way to destruction, because they refuse to love and accept the truth that would save them. So God will cause them to be greatly deceived, and they will believe these lies. Then they will be condemned for enjoying evil rather than believing the truth. (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 NLT).

God will send a strong delusion for those who are left behind so that they will continue to believe that which is false. This has been understood to mean that those who do believe during the great tribulation period are not made up of people who had previously heard the gospel. Instead they consist of those who had not heard the good news before Christ took the living believers with Him into heaven.

Option 2: They Will Have A Second Chance

Others think that the Scripture does not explicitly teach that those who previously heard the good news will be denied a second chance to believe. While it may be harder for them to trust Christ because of the strong delusion which is sent by Satan, it is not impossible for them to believe. In fact, we know that many people will be saved during that period of time. We read about the souls under the altar:

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained (Revelation 6:9 NIV).

We should not assume that these tribulation saints had never heard the message of Christ before this time. Also, we note that the people to whom the strong delusion is sent are those who “take pleasure” in their unrighteousness. In other words, they are not merely rejecting Christ; they are taking pleasure in living ungodly lives. Paul wrote about these types of people in his letter to the Romans. He said:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of human beings who suppress the truth by their wickedness (Romans 1:18 NIV).

Note they are holding down, or suppressing God’s truth. Thus, they are willingly rejecting what they know to be true.

Believe Now!

The key is for the unsaved person to trust Jesus Christ *before* all of these terrible things transpire upon the earth. Thus, this question will not be an issue for them. They will be part of the redeemed.

Summary To Question 17

Will The People Who Have Rejected The Gospel Before The Rapture Takes Place Have Another Chance To Believe After It Has Occurred?

There is a question as to what will occur to those unbelievers who live before and after the rapture. Will they have another chance to believe after rejecting Christ? This question is answered in a number of ways.

First, it is a non-issue for those who believe the rapture will occur moments before Christ returns to the earth. In this scenario, there is no time for anyone to believe in Christ as He is returning to the earth to judge it. When He returns, He returns as Judge.

Those who do believe that there will be some interval between the time of the translation of the church and the Second Coming of Christ answer this question in a number of ways.

To begin with, we find the Scripture saying that there are saints who exist during this Great Tribulation period. They must come from somewhere. Either they were members of the church who entered the Great Tribulation or they became believers during this period.

Some think that those who have previously heard the gospel will not be given another chance to believe. They forfeited their last opportunity at the time of the translation of the church. God will send them a strong delusion so that they will believe whatever particular lie is given to explain what has occurred to those who disappeared.

Others do not see it this way. They contend that there is nothing specifically stated in Scripture which says the rapture ends all opportunity for belief for those left behind.

Scripture does not seem to give a specific answer to this question. The remedy, of course, is to believe now so this will not be an issue.

Question 18

How Will The Rapture Be Explained By Those Who Are Left Behind?

If the rapture of the church happens at some time before the Second Coming of Christ, such as is the position of the Pre-Tribulation, Mid-Tribulation and Pre-Wrath rapture, then there will be an interval between the occurrence of this event and the Second Coming of Christ. Consequently, millions of people from all parts of the earth would suddenly disappear. How will all of this be explained?

It's A Non-Issue For Many

For many Christians, this is a non-issue. Those who believe Christ is coming back for His church at the same time He returns to the earth, the Post-Tribulation view, do not have to answer this question. The explanation as to what happened will be obvious to all! The Book of Revelation says:

“Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen (Revelation 1:7 NIV).

There will be no time or no need to speculate as to what has happened to the believers; everyone will know. Jesus' return will be known to everyone because every eye will see the Lord coming with His saints.

The Bible Does Not Tell Us What They Will Conclude

If there is an interval of time then some explanation has to be provided by those left behind. How they answer this question has not given to us in Scripture. It is silent on this matter. Therefore, any answer which anyone gives will be merely speculation. This, of course, has not stopped people from speculating as to what may occur. We can make the following observations.

1. They Will Believe The Lie

The Bible says that the people left behind will believe “the lie” or “what is false.” God will send these people a strong delusion to believe that which is false. Paul wrote the following to the Thessalonians:

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 NIV).

This seems to indicate that whatever explanation is given to those left behind, it will be believed. The man of sin, the final Antichrist, will have a persuasive explanation which will convince the masses. Since he will be a great orator as well as having the ability to produce miraculous signs, his explanation will carry the day for many people.

Whether he gives a natural explanation or a supernatural explanation, it will not really matter. People will simply *not* believe the truth.

2. Will They Say Humanity Is Moving Forward?

One possible explanation could come from the realm of science. In recent years, some scientists have argued against Charles Darwin's idea of slow gradual evolution. They contend for what is known as "punctuated equilibrium." Simply stated, the theory says that evolution, when it does occur, happens relatively quickly rather than gradually.

This being the case, it could be argued that the disappearance of Christians on a worldwide scale may be attributed to an "evolutionary burst." Human evolution is quickly moving ahead by removing, by some unknown method, the inferior among us, the Christians. These Christians have refused to embrace the idea of the evolution of the human race and thus are halting our progress. Once removed from the scene humanity can move on to the next stage of evolution.

Strange as this may sound to us, an explanation like this could convince multitudes. They will accept any conceivable scientific explanation for the disappearance of so many people. That is, any explanation except the correct one; Jesus Christ has supernaturally taken these people to Himself.

Add to this the fact that many religious leaders will also be left behind! This will give further credence to the argument that whatever happened to the Christians could not have been some wonderful act of God.

This is one of many possible answers which will be given to the disappearance of millions of Christians worldwide. Again, though we do not know what the generally accepted explanation will be, we do know that the masses will blindly accept it.

3. Many People Will Believe In Jesus

Though people will accept these alternative explanations, there is some good news in all of this. Scripture does teach that there will be many believers put to death during this terrible period of tribulation which hits the earth.

The interval between the rapture and the Second Coming will see countless people believing the biblical explanation as to what happened. They will realize Jesus Christ took His true believers unto Himself. This will cause many of them to believe. Yet they will pay for their belief with their lives.

Summary To Question 18

How Will The Rapture Be Explained By Those Who Are Left Behind?

The rapture will remove all true believers from the world. If there is an interval of time between this glorious event and the Second Coming of Christ, then there will be people left behind who witnessed the disappearance of multitudes. Some explanation has to be given by those who were not taken. How will they explain such an unprecedented event?

For those who believe that the rapture of the church will occur at the same time as the Second Coming of Christ this is not an issue. As soon as the believers are caught up to meet Christ, He will arrive on the earth. At that time, every eye will see Him. Thus, those who hold the post-tribulation rapture position need not give an answer to this question.

If there is an interval of time between the rapture and the Second Coming, then some explanation must be given as to what happened. The Bible does not tell us what this will be. Therefore, anything said will only be speculation.

We know that God will send a strong delusion for those unbelievers who are living in this period so they will believe lies rather than the truth. God will do this because these people do not love the truth; neither do they wish to hear it.

In addition, the Bible says that the coming world leader, the Antichrist, will be a man who speaks great things. In other words, he will be a great public speaker. Add to this his ability to perform signs and wonders, we can certainly see how the masses will accept any explanation he may give as to why all these people suddenly disappeared.

It's possible that he may attempt to give a scientific explanation. He could say that human evolution has now made a major jump and ridded the planet of those inferior humans who were denying evolutionary progress, Christians. While this may seem farfetched, we must remember that these people will be willing to believe any explanation, natural or supernatural, rather than believing the truth.

There is some good news. According to Scripture there will be many people who come to faith in Christ during this difficult period. Although many will reject the truth of what happened, others will see the light and place their faith in Jesus.

Appendix 1

If There Is A Literal Millennium On The Earth Who Will Populate It?

One of the key questions with respect to the timing of the rapture of the church has to do with the people who will populate the earth during the 1,000-year millennial reign of Jesus Christ on the earth. If there is going to be a literal thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ upon the earth at His return then who will be the people living on the earth? Where will these people come from who have non-glorified human bodies?

Not Everyone Believes In A Literal Millennium After The Second Coming

To begin with, we must note that not every Bible-believer thinks there will be an actual one-thousand-year period where Jesus Christ rules and reigns upon the earth. There are those who do not believe in an actual thousand-year period of peace on earth known as the millennium. The thousand years is seen as symbolic of a long period of time. Therefore, for those who hold this position, amillennialists, this is not a problem. Others, post-millennialists, believe that the church will bring in the millennium. Jesus Christ will return after the millennium according to this viewpoint.

The Difficulty For The Post-Tribulational Pre-millennial View

Those who believe that there will be a literal millennium or thousand-year reign of Christ upon the earth after Christ returns are known as pre-millennialists. There are a number of people which accept the idea that Scripture teaches a literal millennium but also believe the rapture occurs at the time Christ returns to the earth, post-tribulation.

However, there is a problem for those who hold this perspective which is seemingly insurmountable. This has to do with the people who will populate a literal millennium. Where do they come from?

The Problem Stated

We can simply state the problem in the following manner. If there will be a literal thousand-year period of peace on earth when Christ returns, then someone has to populate the earth at that time. According to many promises in the Old Testament there will be both Jews and Gentiles living together during that period. These people live in the same type of bodies we have now, non-glorified human bodies.

Though the curse on the earth will be partially lifted, people will still sin, and they will one day die. They have not received glorified bodies like the believers who receive these bodies at the rapture of the church. There are a number of passages make it clear.

To begin with, we find that there will be children born in the millennium and these children will be capable of sin. We read in Isaiah:

Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed (Isaiah 65:20 NIV).

We also find that there is sin that takes place during this period. Indeed, Scripture says that people will offer sacrifices:

So the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the LORD. They will worship with sacrifices and grain offerings; they will make vows to the LORD and keep them (Isaiah 19:21 NIV).

These people will sin, grow old and die. This describes a non-glorified human body since a glorified body of the believer can neither sin nor can it die.

All of this means that someone has to enter the millennial kingdom in sinful non-glorified bodies. However, if the rapture of the church occurs immediately before Christ returns, then, by definition, all believers have received their new bodies. The only people who have not been transformed are the unbelievers. So we are left with believers in new bodies and unbelievers in their old bodies.

The Bible teaches the unbelievers will be separated from the believers at the time of the Second Coming of Christ. When He judges the nations upon His return He separates the sheep from the goats, the believers from the unbelievers. Only believers will enter the kingdom.

But here is the problem for the post-tribulational position. Who are these believers with non-glorified bodies who will enter the kingdom? All of the righteous have glorified bodies. Where do these other righteous people come from? In addition, if only righteous people in glorified bodies enter the kingdom, then who is it that sins, grows old, and dies?

To many, this difficulty renders the post-tribulational, pre-millennial view as impossible because there is not any answer which they have to this question.

This Is Not A Problem For Pre-Tribulationism Mid-Tribulationism And Pre-Wrath

While this is a problem for those who hold the post-tribulation rapture position it is not a problem for views such as pre-tribulationism, mid-tribulationism, and Pre-wrath. The answer to where these people come from is simple: these are people who believe in Christ after the rapture of the church happens. They are known as the tribulation saints.

Though many of them will be martyred during the Great Tribulation period others will survive. Those survivors, Jew and Gentile, will enter the millennial kingdom in non-glorified bodies. They are the ones who will populate the millennium at the beginning. Because there will be people entering the millennium in non-glorified bodies an interval between the rapture of the church and the Second Coming of Christ is absolutely necessary. Post-tribulationism has no interval and thus, no answer to this question.

The Post-Tribulation Response

Those who hold the post-tribulation view recognize this problem and have attempted to deal with it in a number of ways. However, as we shall see, none of these answers are satisfactory. Their solutions can be listed as follows.

Option 1: There Will Be Unbelievers Entering The Millennium

One way of dealing with this problem is to assume that the millennium is populated with unbelievers from the very beginning. There are passages which teach that there will be those in the millennium who are not believers. Indeed, at the end of this period there is a great rebellion which takes place. The Bible says:

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth--Gog and Magog--and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp

of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them (Revelation 20:7-9 NIV).

Obviously, this rebellion has to come from unbelievers. Consequently, it is clear that unbelievers exist at some time during the millennium.

Furthermore, when Christ comes back to the earth, we should not assume that He destroys or annihilates all unbelievers at that time. Since there will be unbelievers left upon the earth at the Second Coming, some of these could enter the millennium.

Thus, there are unbelievers from the Gentile nations who survive the Great Tribulation and will enter the millennium. Consequently, we can account for Gentiles in the millennium by seeing them as unbelievers who enter in non-glorified bodies.

Response

This option, while popular, does not solve the problem. For one thing, these passages which speak of unbelievers existing during the millennium have nothing to do with the question as to who enters this time period. In other words, these passages do not deal with the *beginning* of the millennium.

There is no denial on the part of those who believe the pre-tribulation rapture that the millennium will have people who will be unbelievers. Yet, the existence of evil in the millennium does not require that unbelievers enter this period of time.

Thus, the unbelievers in the millennium will be children born to those believers who enter this period of time. These children will have a choice whether to believe or not to believe. It seems that many will not believe. However, there is no evidence that there will be any unbelievers entering the millennium.

Furthermore, there remains the problem of righteous Gentiles entering the millennial kingdom. Where do they come from? Are we to assume that there are only evil Gentiles, and not godly Gentiles, which enter the promised millennium? What type of period of peace and blessing would that be?

The Lost Are Excluded From The Millennium At The Judgment Of The Nations

In Matthew 25, Jesus explained what will happen to the unbelievers when returns to judge the nations. He made it clear unbelievers are *not* allowed to enter the kingdom. In fact, Jesus will have these words for the goats, or the wicked, when He returns:

Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matthew 25:41 NIV).

The wicked will depart from Him at the "Judgment of the Nations." There is no indication whatsoever that that any of them will enter into the kingdom; none at all.

This being the case, then we should try to find a different solution to the problem.

Option 2: The Non-Glorified People Are The 144,000 Jews

There is also the suggestion that the ones entering the millennium are the 144,000 Jews which the Lord supernaturally protects. The Book of Revelation speaks of them. A mighty angel stated the following with a loud voice:

“Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel (Revelation 7:3-4).

The 144,000, it is argued, could possibly be the ones who enter the millennium in non-glorified bodies. This would account for non-glorified people in that period.

Their conversion could happen after the rapture of the church but immediately before the return of Christ. This would allow them to enter this period in non-glorified bodies.

Response

There are a number of problems with saying the 144,000 are those who enter the millennium in non-glorified bodies.

First, the 144,000 are only males. Scripture specifically limits them. They are described as follows:

These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb (Revelation 14:4 NIV).

Even if the 144,000 did not receive glorified bodies at the rapture of the church, this would only account for Jewish males entering into the kingdom of God. It says nothing about Jewish females.

Second, since these people become believers during the Great Tribulation period, there is no reason to suppose they will not be raptured. There is nothing to indicate that these people would be the exception to the rule that all living believers will be snatched up to meet the Lord in the air.

Neither is there any indication that these people come to belief in the Lord late in the tribulation period. They are converted at some moment before Christ comes again. This would make them part of the New Testament church and consequently they too, must be caught up to meet the Lord in the air at the time of the rapture.

Third, this does not solve the problem of Gentiles entering the kingdom. Where do the righteous Gentiles come from who enter the millennium?

Thus, this particular solution does not solve the problem.

Option 3: The Non-Glorified People Are Jews Who Convert At The Coming Of Christ

Some argue that that there will be a number of Jews entering the millennium in non-glorified bodies. These Jews are supernaturally protected by God during the Great Tribulation period. Scripture says the following of them:

The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach (Revelation 12:14 NIV).

According to this scenario, the rapture of the church occurs *before* the battle of Armageddon. Immediately after the rapture takes place, many of these divinely protected Jews will then recognize Jesus as their Messiah. In other words, they will place their faith in Him after the rapture of the church but before His return to the earth to fight the battle of Armageddon. Zechariah speaks of this occurring. He writes:

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo (Zechariah 12:10,11 NIV).

Jesus, along with His saints, will then return to the earth on the Mount of Olives. When these newly-converted Jews see Christ and the raptured saints they will flee on foot to join them. This is also recorded in Zechariah:

On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him (Zechariah 14:4,5 NIV).

Since these Jewish believers will have missed the rapture, they will enter the millennial Kingdom as new converts in natural bodies. They will account for the Jewish people in non-glorified bodies which enter the millennial kingdom.

Response

There are numerous problems with this scenario. We can list them as follows.

For one thing, it appears that the Bible says that belief of the Jews precedes the coming of Christ; it does not come after it. Once they believe and turn to Him as their Messiah, then He returns. It is not the other way around. There are a number of passages which illustrate this. In the Old Testament, we read that Israel converts *before* the Lord returns; not after. The Lord has said:

Then I will return to my lair until they have borne their guilt and seek my face-- in their misery they will earnestly seek me (Hosea 5:15 NIV)

The Lord does not return until the people recognize their guilt. They turn to Him before He comes to them. Immediately, before His betrayal and death, Jesus said something similar to His disciples:

For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' (Matthew 23:39 NIV)

There must be some sort of turning to the Lord before He returns. Consequently, there is nothing whatsoever that hints at some mass conversion after the church is raptured.

Furthermore, to argue for a mass conversion among the Jews after the rapture but while Christ and His saints are on their way to the earth does not seem to fit the scenario the Scripture lays out. For one thing, the only thing which Zechariah says is that the people will go through the process of mourning and great weeping for Jesus their Messiah.

Yet it does not say *when* this will happen. Contrary to what some people believe and teach, we are not told this happens at the time they see Jesus in heaven on His way to the earth.

The mourning and weeping may just as easily take place after they have believed and Christ has returned. Previously they recognized Jesus as the Messiah and they believe on Him for salvation and they were saved. When He returns to Jerusalem and defeats the armies who are attempting to destroy them the realization of

who Jesus is, and how their nation has long-rejected Him, begins to sink in. At that time, they mourn, not before. This is one possible way of understanding what Zechariah is saying.

At best, this only accounts for Jews entering the millennial kingdom. Who are the Gentile, or non-Jewish, sheep which that enter the kingdom? Where do they come from? If every Gentile believer was just raptured, then the only Gentiles left who could enter the kingdom in glorified bodies would be unbelievers. Even if they were allowed to enter the kingdom, of which there is no evidence whatsoever, one certainly could not call them sheep!

At the judgment of the Gentile nations when Christ returns to the earth there are only three identified groups: the sheep, the goats and the brothers. If the goats are the unbelievers and the brothers are identified with the Jews, then who are the Gentile sheep which enter? They must be believers. Where do they come from?

Option 4: There Is A Last-Minute Conversion Of Gentiles After The Rapture

The last option looked at the possibility of a last-minute mass conversion by the Jews after the rapture but before Christ came to earth. It is claimed that this can account for Jews in mortal bodies entering the millennium. This still raises the problems with Gentiles. Where do they come from?

One suggested answer is a last-minute conversion of Gentiles as is the case with the Jews. At the time Christ appears with the newly raptured believers in the clouds, as He is on His way to the earth, a mass conversion takes place. This would account for believers, or sheep, still living at the time of the Second Coming after a post-tribulational rapture takes place. If Jews can convert in mass before in these final moments, then why not the Gentiles also?

Response

This mass conversion scenario will not work. For one thing, the Lord will say the following to the sheep, the righteous ones, which enter the kingdom:

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me (Matthew 25:35-36 NIV).

If these people were converted at the last moment there is no possible way in which all these deeds of mercy could take place. The fact that they performed deeds such as these shows their conversion took place at some interval before the Lord returns in judgment. The timing will not work for a mass conversion.

Scripture Emphasizes Readiness For The Lord's Return

Moreover, the last-minute idea contradicts other parts of Scripture where the Lord emphasizes readiness for His return. For example, in the parable of the ten maidens, or the ten virgins, the unprepared five foolish virgins wanted to come to the wedding feast at the last moment but they were not allowed. Jesus stated it this way:

But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. 'Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!' 'But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.' Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour (Matthew 25:10-13 NIV).

These five unprepared virgins were not allowed to participate in the marriage feast. The Lord did not allow any last-minute conversion from these foolish people. They had their chance; they were warned but they did not listen. This teaches us that there will come a time when it is too late.

Consequently, there are no last-minute conversions before the Lord comes back in glory. People are either ready or they are not. We should not make any exceptions to this because the Bible does not.

Thus, there does not seem to be any way of accounting for the Gentiles entering the kingdom in non-glorified bodies from the position of the post-tribulation rapture.

Option 5: The Judgment Of The Nations, Recorded In Matthew 25, Is At The End Of The Millennium Thus Unbelieving Gentiles Can Enter The Kingdom

If the “Judgment of the Nations” takes place at the return of Christ, at the end of the seventieth week of Daniel, then it seems to preclude people in non-glorified bodies from entering the millennial kingdom. The sheep which enter the kingdom at this time must come from somewhere but there is no conceivable way to have any sheep left if they have all been raptured immediately before Christ comes to the earth.

The Solution: There Is No Judgment When Christ Returns

Many post-tribulation advocates recognize that there seems to be no way of getting around this. Consequently, another solution has been offered by them: The “Judgment of the Nations,” recorded in Matthew 25, does not take place when Christ returns rather this judgment occurs the *end* of the millennium rather than at the beginning of it.

This particular judgment is therefore equated with the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20. Therefore, the two judgments recorded are actually one-in-the-same.

Thus, the judgment Jesus spoke of in Matthew 25 is the final judgment for all people of all ages, both Jew and Gentile; it is not a judgment to see who will enter the millennial kingdom. In fact, there is no judgment at the beginning of the millennium.

This scenario allows for the inclusion of people in non-glorified bodies to enter the millennium with a post-tribulation rapture. Since there is no judgment of Jews or Gentiles when the Lord returns, the Gentile population of the millennium can be made up of the people who were not destroyed at the Second Coming of Christ; Gentile unbelievers. While there is a resurrection of believers at the Second Coming of Christ when the rapture takes place, there is no judgment of anyone at that time.

There are a number of reasons as to why this viewpoint is held.

Gaps Between The Statements Are Possible

For one thing, Matthew 25:31 speaks of the return of Christ to the earth and the fact that He sits upon His throne of glory. It reads as follows:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne (Matthew 25:31 NIV).

However, it is argued that these two events should not be assumed to happen one after another. The return of Christ and His placement upon the throne are said to occur one thousand years apart. The first part of verse 31 speaks only of the return of Christ while the latter part of this verse, when He sits on His earthly throne to judge the people, is said to take place some one thousand years later.

This judgment is the final judgment where all human beings from all time are judged, the Last Judgment. We should not assume it occurs directly after the return of Christ to the earth. Thus, in this one verse, there is a one-thousand-year gap between events.

The Nations Are Both Jews And Gentiles

Furthermore, there is nothing in this passage which indicates the judgment is for admission into the earthly kingdom. The term “nations” is used in the universal sense of both Jews and Gentiles. It does not have the limited meaning of only Gentile people. Everyone will be judged at this last judgment.

Unbelieving Gentiles May Enter The Kingdom

Consequently, since there is no judgment of Gentiles at the time of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the living ones are free to enter the one-thousand-year earthly kingdom. Therefore, the Gentiles which enter this kingdom, after the Great Tribulation and the rapture of the church, consist of certain unrighteous individuals who survived the war of Armageddon and the Second Coming of Christ. They are unbelieving Gentiles.

There is a passage in the Book of Zechariah which seems to teach this:

On that day there will be neither sunlight nor cold, frosty darkness. It will be a unique day--a day known only to the LORD--with no distinction between day and night. When evening comes, there will be light. On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half of it east to the Dead Sea and half of it west to the Mediterranean Sea, in summer and in winter. The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name (Zechariah 14:16-9 NIV).

The above passage speaks of survivors of the Great Tribulation. These individuals lived through the judgment of Jesus at His Second Coming. From the context, it seems clear that these survivors are unbelievers in that they were personally involved in the attack on Jerusalem.

Zechariah thus says that those who enter the millennial kingdom will include the wicked survivors of the Great Tribulation. We can determine this from the phrase he uses: “everyone who is left of all the nations.” These are unbelievers who attacked the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Therefore, by definition, they are the part of the evil armies who will converge on the Holy Land at the end of the Great Tribulation. Not all of them will be destroyed at the Second Coming of Christ; some will go into the millennium.

This seems to be confirmed in the next verse when we are told of their refusal to go up to Jerusalem to worship the King. Believers would never be described in this manner. This gives further indication we are dealing with unbelievers.

This passage accounts for their existence. The fact that these people are spoken of as being “left” shows that they were not born during the millennium, but that they survived the Great Tribulation and entered the millennium.

This shows that the “Judgment of the Nations” cannot possibly take place before the beginning of the millennium. Indeed, the fact that at this judgment, all the goats, the unbelievers, are condemned to eternal punishment shows it could not take place then. If it did occur at that time, then there would be no unsaved people left to enter the millennium.

Furthermore, it seems that some of those who will enter the millennium at this time will refuse the command to go to Jerusalem for the worship of the Lord. This refusal reveals they are not among the righteous. This passage refutes any idea which would forbid any wicked person from entering the millennium.

Summing It Up

Therefore, from an examination of the totality of Scripture many who hold the post-tribulation rapture position conclude that the judgment Jesus is teaching about in Matthew 25 does not take place at His return to the earth but rather at the very end of His one-thousand-year earthly kingdom. It is the same judgment as recorded in Revelation 20, the Final Judgment. The fact that Scripture also teaches that there will be unbelievers who enter the millennium clearly demonstrates that the “Judgment of the Nations” could not take place at this time.

Understanding these truths solves the issue as to where the Gentiles come from who populate the millennium; they are the survivors of the Great Tribulation. Therefore, the post-tribulation rapture scenario can account for people in non-glorified bodies entering a literal millennium on the earth.

Response

There are a number of difficulties with equating this judgment in Matthew 25 with the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20 as well as insisting unbelievers enter the millennial kingdom. These problems can be stated as follows.

The Times Of Judgment Are Different

A simple reading of the text will show that the “Judgment of the Nations” takes place when Christ returns to the earth while the Great White Throne Judgment occurs after the millennium. The setting is the Second Coming of Christ.

To begin with, we must remember the direct questions His disciples asked Him:

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. “Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.” As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:1-3 NIV).

The disciples of Jesus wanted to know when the Temple would be destroyed as well as what would be the sign of His coming and the end of *this* age.

When asked the direct question by His disciples, Jesus then gave an extended answer (Matthew 24-25). His answer concluded with the explanation of what would occur when He returned to the earth. Jesus put it this way:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:31-32 NIV).

The explanation Jesus gave the disciples explained how this present age would end; not end of the kingdom age which occurs *after* this present age. The “Judgment of the Nations” ends this age, not the millennial age.

On the other hand, the Great White Throne Judgment takes place following the one-thousand-year millennial kingdom. We read about this in the Book of Revelation:

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth-- Gog and Magog-- to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books (Revelation 20:7-12 NIV).

Therefore, we have two different times in which these events take place. To move the "Judgment of the Nations" at the end of the millennium rather than at the beginning, while not impossible, does not fit the context of Matthew 25 neither does it answer the question the disciples of Jesus asked Him. It must be inserted into the text at Matthew 25:31. There must be compelling reasons to make such an insertion.

There Are Different People Involved In The Judgments

There is also the matter of different people involved at the two judgments. At the "Judgment of the Nations," when Christ returns to the earth, there are three groups of people are specified. First, we have the sheep which are the Gentile believers who will enter the kingdom. Next, we have the goats, the unbelieving Gentiles, which are sent away to judgment. Finally, there is a group called the brothers are a distinct entity from the sheep and goats. Jesus said:

All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. . . The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' . . . He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me' (Matthew 25:32,40,45).

The Great White Throne judgment involves all the unbelieving dead from all ages, Jews and Gentiles. They are not merely those from the Gentile nations. Furthermore, there is no indication of believers being present or entering the kingdom. We read the following in the Book of Revelation:

To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword (Revelation 20:12 NIV).

Not only do we have different times for these judgments there are different people involved in these judgments.

The Living Are Judged At The Judgment Of The Nations: The Dead Are Raised For The Great White Throne Judgment

We can note further differences between the two judgments. At the "Judgment of the Nations" there is no mention of the resurrection of the dead. It is the living nations which are brought before the King. Jesus said:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:31-32 NIV).

These people who are judged are the living; there is no mention anywhere of raising the dead on this occasion for this particular judgment.

However, a resurrection does take place in connection with the Great White Throne judgment:

The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and everyone was judged according to what they had done (Revelation 20:13 NIV).

Thus, the one judgment is of the living while the other judgment is of the dead. Again, we have the contrast between the two.

The Basis For The Judgments Is Different

We also find a different basis for each judgment. The basis at the “Judgment of the Nations” is very specific: how Christ’s “brothers” were treated by those who are being judged. The King said the following words to the sheep, and then the goats:

The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ . . . ‘He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me’ (Matthew 25:40, 45 NIV).

The sheep enter the kingdom based upon their treatment of the brothers while the goats are sent away to judgment because of their lack of concern for the brothers.

However, at the Great White Throne Judgment people will be judged based upon their works. We read the following in the Book of Revelation:

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books (Revelation 20:12 NIV).

There is nothing in this context about the treatment of the brothers; only their works are mentioned.

Furthermore, their ultimate rejection from the kingdom of God is the fact that their names are not written in the Book of Life. Again, we read in Revelation:

All whose names were not found written in the book of life were thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15 NIV).

There is no mention of any books or book in the “Judgment of the Nations.” Thus, the very basis of these judgments is entirely different.

The Results Are Different: Righteous Enter Kingdom Compared To Unbelievers Thrown Into Lake Of Fire

Finally, the results are different in the two judgments. At the “Judgment of the Nations,” the result is as follows: the sheep, the righteous, enter into the kingdom while the goats, the unrighteous, are sent away to the lake of fire. Jesus said:

Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world’ (Matthew 25:34 NIV).

The kingdom is the promised earthly kingdom. It is the first stage of the eternal kingdom.

At the Great White Throne Judgment, the wicked dead are cast into the lake of fire. The Book of Revelation says:

All whose names were not found written in the book of life were thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15 NIV).

However, there is no mention of any judgment of the righteous. Therefore, the participants are different. The righteous are not judged at this time because they have already received their rewards.

There Conditions Surrounding The Judgment Of The Nations Does Not Fit The Millennium

There is a further problem which this view has, the persecution of Christians in the millennium. The Scriptures uniformly teach that the millennium will be a time when the Lord Himself rules the world. He is in charge of everything. Conditions will be ideal.

Yet at the “Judgment of the Nations,” those who are admitted to kingdom were said to have done the following:

Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me (Matthew 25:34-36 NIV).

These conditions, hunger, sickness, prison, and persecution certainly are not characteristic of the period of the millennium! Rather they are characteristic of the suffering of people in the Great Tribulation. Thus, the context of the “Judgment of the Nations” fits well with the Second Coming but cannot possibly describe the period of the millennium.

Conclusion: Two Different Judgments Are In View

To summarize what we have found: the two judgments should not be equated. First, they take place at different times; the “Judgment of the Nations” is before the Millennium while the Great White Throne Judgment is after the Millennium.

Next, there are different people involved; sheep, goats, brothers at “Judgment of the Nations” while only unbelievers are judged at the Great White Throne.

In addition, the ones judged are in different physical states; the living nations are judged when Christ returns, the dead are raised at the end of the millennium for the Final Judgment. The basis of the judgment is also different; the treatment of brothers of Christ at the “Judgment of the Nations” is what decides one’s fate. However, at the Last Judgment, the lost are lost because their names are not found written in the Book of Life. In addition, the results are different; at the “Judgment of the Nations” the righteous enter while the unrighteous are banished from the kingdom. However, nothing is said of the judgment of the righteous at the Final Judgment; it is only a judgment of unbelievers.

Finally, the righteous people at this judgment are allowed into the kingdom because of their treatment of the down and out; the sick, hungry, persecuted and imprisoned. This description fits well with the terrible time of the Great Tribulation but cannot by any stretch of the imagination describe the predicted millennial reign of Christ.

These facts make it clear that we should not equate these two judgments; they take place at different times with different people involved.

There Are No Wicked People Which Enter The Millennium

A few more words also need to be said about the idea of wicked Gentiles entering the millennium; something which is absolutely necessary for the post-tribulation rapture view to work. While we have already touched on this point, it is necessary to give an extended reply here.

Scripture is clear that no wicked people enter Christ's kingdom when He returns. When all the evidence is considered, this conclusion can hardly be doubted. There are a number of things which should be emphasized.

First, we begin by looking at an extended passage from the Book of Revelation. John explains what occurs at the Second Coming of Christ:

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small." Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh (Revelation 19:11-21 NIV).

The enemies of the Lord are slaughtered at the return of Christ. There is no indication whatsoever of anything but judgment awaiting them. This could not be clearer.

Isaiah the prophet also testified to this judgment which would occur at the coming of the Lord. He wrote about it in this manner:

See, the LORD is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with his sword the LORD will execute judgment on all people, and many will be those slain by the LORD (Isaiah 66:15-16 NIV)

Judgment will be executed on everyone at the coming of the Lord. This fact accords well with what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about the return of Christ. He put it this way:

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 NIV).

There will also be a special judgment of the Jews when Christ returns. Ezekiel wrote about this:

As I judged your ancestors in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will judge you, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will take note of you as you pass under my rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.

I will purge you of those who revolt and rebel against me. Although I will bring them out of the land where they are living, yet they will not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD (Ezekiel 20:36-38 NIV).

The Scriptures are abundantly clear; all unbelievers, Jew and Gentile, will be judged by the Lord at His Second Coming. None of these unbelievers will be permitted to enter the millennial kingdom. Israel will pass under the rod and be purged of its rebels.

The unbelieving Gentiles, called the goats by Jesus, will be sent away to eternal punishment. All unbelievers will be punished; none of them will be rewarded with the entrance to the promised millennial kingdom with all its blessings.

Judgment Before The Earthly Kingdom Begins Is A Common Theme In The Gospels

The idea of the judgment of the wicked before the kingdom age begins is a common theme which runs through the gospels, particularly the gospel of Matthew. The evidence is as follows.

John the Baptist made it clear that judgment would precede entrance to the kingdom. He said that only those who were worthy would enter. Matthew describes what John said in this manner:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, We have Abraham as our father. I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:7-12 NIV).

Notice that there were spiritual qualifications to enter the kingdom. Those who did not qualify would not enter. Many other passages in the gospels teach the same thing.

In another instance, Jesus made it clear that merely being descendants of Abraham would not secure them a place in the kingdom of God:

But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12 NIV).

Those who were trusting in their heritage alone would be banished from the kingdom. To enter the kingdom there must be spiritual qualifications.

Unbelievers Are Sent Away To Judgment: Not Brought Into The Kingdom

In the parable of the wheat and the weeds we discover that the following will happen to those who do not believe:

As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:40-42 NIV).

The unbelievers would be judged; all of them!

Later in this chapter in Matthew, we find Jesus again talking about those who will be sent to the furnace of fire:

This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:49-50 NIV).

Again, we find the evil people separated from the righteous at the end of this age. There is no idea whatsoever of these unbelieving people entering the kingdom.

In another parable, we are told that the following was to be the destiny of the ones who rejected Jesus:

Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Matthew 22:13 NIV).

These statements of judgment are not limited to Matthew. In Jesus' parable of the pounds, recorded by Luke, He illustrates graphically what will happen to those who have rejected His Kingship:

But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them--bring them here and kill them in front of me (Luke 19:27 NIV).

This leaves no room for unbelievers entering God's kingdom.

These People In The Tribulation Have Taken The Mark Of The Beast

Let us remember something else; to be able to buy or sell during this Great Tribulation period these people would have to have willingly taken mark of the beast. The Bible explains what will happen in this manner:

It [the second beast] was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name (Revelation 13:15-17 NIV).

Taking this mark constitutes showing allegiance to this beast. These people not only take his mark upon their right hands and foreheads they also worship this individual. Are we to assume that the Lord would allow some of these people to enter His blessed kingdom? To the contrary, we are specifically told about the judgment these people would receive:

And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name (Revelation 14:11 NIV).

This statement precludes them from entering the kingdom.

Thus, from the totality of Scripture we find a clear message with respect to qualifications to enter the kingdom; it is only believers who may enter. To the unbelievers, Jesus never gave words of welcome. Instead, He said, "Depart from me!"

Zechariah 14:16-19 Must Be Interpreted In Light Of These Passages

Therefore, Zechariah 14:16-19, which many people view as saying unbelievers do enter the kingdom, must be interpreted in light of these other passages. Since the Bible does not contradict itself there must be another explanation than the one given by those who hold the post-tribulation viewpoint.

Indeed, a simple explanation can be given. There will be people from among those nations that attacked Jerusalem who will repent and believe. These are individuals that will worship Jesus the King. In the millennium they will be required to go to Jerusalem and celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.

As the years pass there will be people born to these children. When they grow to adulthood, they will have their own chance to accept or reject the king. Zechariah 14:16 refers to the first generation of millennial citizens who came through the judgments as believers, not unbelievers, and who will voluntarily go to Jerusalem to worship the King.

However, as we move to verses 17-21, we find that they describe conditions throughout the entire period of the millennium, not just at the beginning. As time goes on, some from among the nations will not obey the King nor go up to Jerusalem to worship Him. They will have to be punished.

Once we understand the complete context of Zechariah 14, we have no contradiction with other portions of Scripture.

Conclusion: The Option Fails To Avoid The Conflict Of A Post-Tribulation Rapture

Therefore, the argument fails that the “Judgment of the Nations” is the same as the final judgment and hence no unbelievers are judged at the time of the Second Coming.

Option 6: The Righteous Are Judged At The Second Coming The Unrighteous At The End Of The Millennium

This option is similar to the last one. It equates *part* of the judgment of Matthew 25 with the Final Judgment of Revelation 20 but not all of it. Instead of placing the entire judgment at the end of the millennium, this view has the judgments of Matthew 25 of the righteous and unrighteous as being a thousand years apart. In other words, the righteous are judged at the coming of Christ but the unrighteous are not judged until the end of the millennium.

Thus, the coming judgments which Jesus spoke about in Matthew 25 do not occur at the same time. It is contended that when Christ returns at His Second Coming only the righteous are rewarded at that time. The judgment of the unrighteous does not occur till the end of the millennium.

It is argued that this is consistent with what we find elsewhere in Scripture. There may be a considerable interval of time between two events listed in the same context. Thus, there is nothing contrary to biblical teaching by saying that the judgment of the righteous occurs at the time of the Second Coming while the unrighteous are judged together at the end of the Millennium at the Great White Throne Judgment.

There are a number of reasons as to why this is claimed to be the case. Many of the same arguments are used as in the previous option we mentioned so we do not have to go into them in detail. However, there are a few specific points we did not mention in dealing with our last option which we can take up here. In doing so, it will cover all the major points made for the inclusion of unbelieving Gentiles entering the kingdom.

The Unbelievers At The Judgment Of The Nations Enter Eternal Judgment

Support for this comes from the fact that Jesus said this “Judgment of the Nations” would result in eternal condemnation for wicked. This shows that we are dealing with a final judgment; an everlasting judgment as far as the wicked are concerned. Thus, it must refer to the same judgment as found in the Book of Revelation, the Last Judgment. This, therefore, is the final judgment for the wicked; it is not a determination of who will enter the millennium. Jesus specifically said that these unbelievers are being sent to “eternal judgment. We read:

Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’ (Matthew 25:41 NIV).

However, if these unbelievers are judged at this time, it would not be eternal punishment they received. A further judgment awaits them at the end of the millennium.

Consequently, if these unbelievers are going to eternal fire at the time of judgment, it seems to better to equate this judgment with the Great White Throne Judgment that Revelation 20 records. It is explained in this manner:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15 NIV).

This is the only place where we find a universal eternal judgment of all unbelievers. After the books are opened, and the unbelievers are judged, they are sent to the lake of fire. This judgment to the lake of fire occurs after the millennium.

Response

While this is offered as a solution to the problem of non-glorified people entering the millennium in a post-tribulation view, like the previous option we looked at, it really does not solve the problem. Many of the responses which we gave to the previous option can be applied here. In addition, we will deal with the other specific points which were raised.

To begin with, we find that the living unbelievers will be judged at the end of this age when Christ returns. Jesus made this clear. He explained the meaning of this parable of the wheat and the weeds in the following manner:

And the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:39-42 NIV).

The end of this age occurs at the Second Coming of Christ, not at the end of the millennium.

There Are Phases Of Eternal Life

The fact that those who come before the Lord at the “Judgment of the Nations” are sent away to eternal condemnation or eternal life does not mean we are dealing with the Last Judgment. The fact that the unbelievers are sent away to the judgment of eternal fire is not a problem.

Scripture says that unbelievers, who are presently in the intermediate state before the final judgment, are suffering the torment of fire. Jesus’ story recorded in Luke 16:19-31 illustrates this. He told of an unbelieving rich man who was consciously suffering everlasting torment. The rich man seeing Abraham at a distance described his situation as follows:

So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire’ (Luke 16:24 NIV).

He was in conscious torment. His eternal judgment had already begun.

The fact that unbelievers will one day have to stand before the Living God and give an account of their lives does not mean that their eternal judgment cannot begin earlier. Indeed, unbelievers are already in a state of condemnation in this life. Once they die, their *eternal* separation between themselves and the Lord begins. Therefore, it is not a problem that these people at the judgment of the nations are sent away into “eternal punishment” before they appear before the Lord at the Last Judgment.

Are There Jewish Believers But Gentile Unbelievers?

Even if we agree that this Judgment of the Nations, as far as unbelievers are concerned, refers to the Great White Throne Judgment at the end of the millennium there is still the problem of saying that unbelievers will enter the blessings of this special age. This seems hard to reconcile with statements of Scripture about the millennium. We read the following about the judgment of the Jews:

I will take note of you as you pass under my rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. I will purge you of those who revolt and rebel against me. Although I will bring them out of the land where they are living, yet they will not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD (Ezekiel 20:37-38 NIV).

This seems to eliminate any ability of Jewish unbelievers to enter the millennium. The believing Jews will enter the kingdom while the unbelievers will not. This gives further evidence that only believers will enter this thousand-year period.

Option 7: It Is Children Who Populate The Millennium

There is also the possibility suggested that those who enter the millennium are children who have not reached the age of accountability. They would not be condemned along with the unbelieving adults because they have not come to the place where they could make a decision for or against Christ. The children, both Jews and Gentiles, could be candidates to enter the millennium. This would then allow for people with non-glorified bodies to enter the millennium as well as account for all the unbelievers being kept from the kingdom.

Response

There are a number of problems with this suggestion that the millennium is basically populated with children. They include the following.

Nothing Is Said About Children

First, there is no evidence whatsoever that it will only be children who enter the millennial kingdom. The Scripture is silent on the fate of children and the entrance to the millennium. Therefore, it is not wise to build a case upon silence. We are not told what will happen to them.

The Righteous Enter The Kingdom

A further problem is that those who enter the millennial kingdom as sheep are called righteous. This assumes that they have shown some amount of faith. Indeed, their deeds of faith are recorded. Jesus Himself said that the actions they performed toward the least of His brothers were performed toward Him:

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 'The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me' (Matthew 25:37-40 NIV).

These specific deeds of mercy seem to eliminate children as being the sheep which are in view here. These individuals who enter the kingdom are righteous Gentiles. Again, the question remains, "Who are they?" Post-tribulationism has no answer.

Conclusion

Given the evidence we have examined, it looks like this one issue makes a rapture of the believers at the end of the tribulation period as something which is seemingly impossible; if there is a literal millennium after Christ returns and an immediate judgment of those who are left.

The fact that no satisfactory answer can be given may be seen as fatal to this theory. Perhaps there is an answer from the post-tribulation point of view but the ones offered so far come well short of being satisfactory.

Summary To Appendix 1: If There Is A Literal Millennium On The Earth Who Will Populate It?

To some people, there is a specific factor which eliminates one potential theory as to the timing of the rapture. This concerns those who will populate the earth when Christ returns.

The pre-millennial, post-tribulation view has the church being translated, or raptured immediately before the Second Coming of Christ to the earth. This leads to a problem for those who hold this position as to the timing of the rapture. If all believers are raptured immediately before Jesus returns, then who will populate the millennium?

Since the millennium is a time when people will live upon the earth in non-glorified human bodies these people must come from somewhere. Yet if all believers were given immortal glorified bodies when Christ returns to the earth then there is nobody left to populate the earth in non-glorified bodies. Those who believe that a literal millennium will occur on the earth, yet hold to a post-tribulation rapture must give an adequate answer to this question.

One option says that unbelievers will enter the millennium. This will account for people entering this time in non-glorified bodies if all believers receive glorified bodies at the coming of Christ. Furthermore, we know that there will be unbelievers living during the millennial period.

However, there is no passage in Scripture which says there are unbelievers who enter the millennium. In fact, just the opposite is the case. The unbelievers, according to Jesus, are sent away into everlasting punishment when He returns. There are no exceptions. So this does not seem to be a possible answer.

There is also the option that the 144,000 converted Jews which are mentioned in the Book of Revelation are the ones who will populate the millennium in non-glorified bodies. They are converted during the Great Tribulation period and are specially used by the Lord to preach His message during this period. It has been suggested that they enter the millennium in non-glorified bodies.

Yet this possibility really does not solve anything. There evidence is that this group becomes believers long before Christ returns. Thus, they should be included in a post-tribulation rapture. Furthermore, they are said to be males, not females. Thus, you would still have the problem of finding where Jewish females enter into the millennium. In addition, the question remains as to where the Gentiles come from since the millennium consists of both Jews and Gentiles in non-glorified bodies.

Some say that the non-glorified people in the millennium are Jews which convert at the last-minute as Christ is descending from heaven. As He is coming to the earth, after the rapture of the church, they see Him coming in the clouds and then realize that He is their promised Messiah. Thus, a national conversion occurs before Jesus comes with His church to fight the Battle of Armageddon.

There are two problems with this answer. First, all the evidence seems to indicate that the national conversion of Israel takes place *before* Christ leaves heaven and descends to the earth. Their belief in Jesus is what brings Him to the earth; His coming does not convert them. In addition, Jesus made it clear that the Jewish people would not see Him again until they accepted Him as their true Messiah. Thus, the conversion of the Jews comes before the return of Christ, not afterward.

Even if this scenario is correct, there is still the problem of populating the millennium with righteous Gentiles. Where will they come from?

Others believe that the righteous Gentiles come from those who mass convert at the last moment before Christ returns. Since it is possible there is a last-minute conversion of the Jews, it should be possible to have the same thing with the Gentiles.

Yet this will not work. The entrance of the Gentiles into the kingdom comes from their righteous deeds towards the “brothers” of Christ. A last -minute conversion will not satisfy these conditions.

Certain advocates of post-tribulationism answer the question by moving the “Judgment of the Nations,” which Jesus spoke about in Matthew 25, to the end of the millennium rather than the beginning. In this scenario, there is no judgment of anyone at the time of the Second Coming and the beginning of the millennium. This view holds that those who enter this kingdom age are possibly Jews converted at the last moment as well as some Gentile unbelievers. Since not everyone will be destroyed when Christ returns, it is suggested that the Gentiles who make up the population of the millennium consist of these people.

There is a passage in Zechariah which is claimed by some to teach that unbelievers enter the millennial kingdom. This fits with the idea that there is no judgment of the wicked before the millennium begins.

This solution, however, does not provide a sufficient answer. We again emphasize there is no evidence that unbelievers enter the millennium. Jesus said they are sent away to everlasting punishment. Furthermore, according to Jesus, the setting of the “Judgment of the Nations” is at the coming of Christ to the earth; the beginning of the millennium rather than the end.

A variation of this view has part of the “Judgment of the Nations” occurring at the Second Coming of Christ while the other part of the judgment at the end of the millennium. It is thought that the saved or the righteous are judged when Christ returns but the unbelievers are not judged until the end of the thousand years. This allows the millennium to be populated with people in non-glorified bodies.

While it is possible that the judgments do not happen at the same time this spacing them out does not seem to solve the problem. In fact, it ends up with the millennium being populated mainly by unbelievers! This is completely contrary to the promises of Scripture to those who have believed. They are promised to enter the kingdom the unbelievers are not.

There is also the option that the millennium is populated by children, both Jews and Gentiles. This argument comes in several forms. One idea has all children which survive until the end of the tribulation as entering the millennium. Others argue that just the children of believers enter the thousand year period of peace. According to this view, these children are not taken up in the rapture of the church but are left on the earth as Christ is judging the unbelieving world.

Again, this solves nothing. There is no indication that children are a special class of people which will be given a pass when it comes to judgment. Furthermore, those which are said to enter the kingdom are those who have done good deeds to the brothers of Christ. They visited people in prison; they met the needs of the poor. This is not speaking of the deeds of children. None of the possible scenarios offered by post-tribulationists answers this question as to who populates a literal millennium in non-glorified bodies if there is a rapture of the church at the time of the Second Coming. This being the case, it seems to be strong evidence that there will not be a post-tribulation rapture occurring before a literal millennium.

About The Author

Don Stewart is a graduate of Biola University and Talbot Theological Seminary (with the highest honors).

Don is a best-selling and award-winning author having authored, or co-authored, over eighty books. This includes the best-selling *Answers to Tough Questions*, with Josh McDowell, as well as the award-winning book *Family Handbook of Christian Knowledge: The Bible*. His various writings have been translated into over thirty different languages and have sold over a million copies.

Don is now a full-time missionary with GoinChrist Ministries. His website educatingourworld.com provides many free resources for those wanting to know what Christians believe, as well as why we believe.

Currently there are 64 books on the site in PDF form, totaling about 13,000 pages of material while answering over 1,900 questions. All of his books can be downloaded for free on his website www.educatingourworld.com.