

The Rapture

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A Place in the Wilderness

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The matter of the rapture is an extremely controversial topic among Christians today. There is a plethora of opinions enveloping the believers. In this booklet, we are going to enter a thick forest—the forest of confusion among Christians regarding the rapture. Then, we will make our way through this forest to the other side, and emerge into the crystal clear truth of God's Word.

To see the truth clearly, we must first remove and discard the weeds, thorns, thistles, and brush obscuring the truth. While this may be a taxing endeavor, it is unfortunately necessary. Do bear with a few pages that describe the confused thinking occurring in today's Christianity.

Two Doctrines

There are two major doctrines regarding the rapture. The first, and most prominent, is that of *pre-tribulation* rapture—that all Christians will be taken from the Earth before the final upheavals of this age strike the Earth. There is, at first reading, some ground for this understanding in 1 Thessalonians.¹ There, the Apostle Paul tells us the dead will be resurrected, and we who are alive will be caught up together with them to meet with the Lord in the air.

The second is the doctrine of *post-tribulation* rapture. Those who hold to this doctrine base their understanding on 1 Corinthians 15,² which tells us that the dead are raised, and we are changed at

¹ 1 Thes. 4:15-17

² 1 Cor. 15:52

the *last trumpet*, which will occur at the close of this age,¹ at the conclusion of the endtime tribulation. This doctrine also *seems* well-founded in the Word.

Analysis of the Pre-tribulation Rapture

Let us examine each of these doctrines more closely to see if they survive biblical scrutiny. As mentioned before, the doctrine of pre-tribulation rapture states that all believers will be taken before the endtime troubles occur. However, let us look at 1 Corinthians 15. There,² the apostle Paul speaks of the resurrection of the dead and the change to the bodies of the living saints that will occur at that same time. Paul states this will happen at the *last trumpet*.

In Revelation, there are seven trumpets.³ The last of these—the seventh—occurs at the very end of the great troubles that will overwhelm the Earth at the close of this age. Indeed, Revelation⁴ tells us that at the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the mystery of God is finished, and the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and Christ. Therefore, it is apparent that the events described by the apostle Paul occur after nearly all the great endtime disasters strike the Earth. This directly contradicts the doctrine of pre-tribulation rapture.

Jubilee

To somehow fit 1 Corinthians 15 into pre-tribulation doctrine, some state that the last trumpet referred to in 1 Corinthians is the trumpet of Jubilee, not the last trumpet in Revelation.

¹ Rev. 10:5-7, 11:15-18

² 1 Cor. 15:51-52

³ Rev. 8:1-2

⁴ Rev. 10:7, 11:15

However, it is not clear that the year of Jubilee has ever been celebrated, and it certainly has not for thousands of years. It is a great stretch to attribute Paul's word in Corinthians to an essentially non-existent celebration. In addition, if Paul were referring to the year of Jubilee, for some reason, would he not have said so by stating "the trumpet of Jubilee?" But, he did not say this because it is not the case.

Furthermore, there is no evidence in Paul's writings—or in the whole New Testament—to support such a conjecture. In the New Testament, the seven trumpets in Revelation are the only trumpets of significance, and the only ones related to the endtime.

No reasonable and unbiased analysis of scripture could conclude that the trumpet in 1 Corinthians is other than the seventh trumpet in Revelation.

God's Love

Another effort to bolster the shaky foundation upon which pre-tribulation rapture rests is the common and oft-stated belief that God loves us. Because God loves us, He would never harm us. Therefore, since He would never harm us, He would never pass us through the great tribulations coming at the end of this age.

In response to this, we have to agree that God loves us and would never harm us. However, to believe He would not pass us through tribulation because of His love is not only incorrect, but also directly contradicted by the Bible.

Look at Hebrews 12.¹ There, the writer of Hebrews—presumably the apostle Paul—tells us that God does and *will* chastise us. He points out that every proper father disciplines his children. And, if we do so, how much more God? He goes on to say that God does this so we might become partakers of His holiness.

¹ Heb. 12:7

If necessary, God will do whatever it takes to bring His sons into His holiness and glory. For those children who are recalcitrant, the Lord will use extreme measures—even death¹—to discipline rebellious children. A father who does not discipline his children is a father who does not love his children. God will use all means necessary to bring His children into His holiness.

It is *because* He loves us that He disciplines us. If God did not discipline us and pass us through what was necessary for our good, He would then be an uncaring Father. But He certainly is not that. God loves us. However, because of His love, He will, if necessary, pass us through the tribulations at the end of this age.

Consider our own daily lives. How many extremely difficult things do we pass through? God disciplines us, even severely, *because* He loves us. For Him, not to discipline us would be a *lack of love*.

Which one of us does not discipline our children? We discipline them to correct and adjust them in their upbringing, so that their behavior and character will be proper. As Paul tells us in Hebrews,² if we do this for our children, will not God discipline us?

There is no doubt that God will discipline us as is needed to bring us into the holiness, purity, and glory He has prepared for us. He will do whatever is necessary for our well-being, because of His great love for us.

Therefore, to say that because God loves us, He would not pass us through the endtime tribulation is a great misunderstanding. It is *because He loves us* that He would do exactly that.

¹ 1 Cor. 11:28-32

² Heb. 12:9

Some Are Left

This doctrine also has serious problems with other verses, such as Matthew 24:40-41. There, when speaking about His coming, the Lord says, “Then shall two men be in the field; one is taken, and one is left: two women shall be grinding at the mill; one is taken, and one is left.” He then goes on to say, “Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh.”¹ Later in that same chapter He tells us to be ready, “for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh.”²

Those who hold the doctrine of pre-tribulation rapture explain these verses by saying the one left is an unbeliever, but there are serious difficulties with this understanding.

First, the Lord was speaking to *His disciples* when he said these things, not to humanity in general. Therefore, He must be warning the believers.

Next, He told His disciples to watch and to be ready.³ The unbelievers do not read the Bible; therefore the Lord must have been speaking *to the believers*, telling them to watch and to be ready. This indicates that if the believers do not watch and are unprepared for the Lord's return, they will be left behind to pass through the tribulation.

In addition, there are verses in Mark and Luke that disprove pre-tribulation rapture. In Mark, the Lord says, “And what I say unto you I say unto all, *Watch*”⁴ Certainly the believers are included in “all.” We all must watch! Otherwise, we will be left behind to pass through the endtime.

¹ Matt. 24:42

² Matt. 24:44

³ Matt. 24:42, 44

⁴ Mark 13:35-37

In Luke, He tells us that we should watch at every season, praying, that we might be accounted worthy to escape all that is about to come upon the Earth and stand before Him.¹ This indicates that if we do not watch, if we do not pray, we will *not* be accounted worthy, and we will *not* escape what is coming upon the Earth. In other words, we will pass through the tribulation if we are not prepared for the Lord's return.

Revelation

There are other verses as well that clearly indicate some believers will be on the Earth during the great endtime troubles. In Revelation 8,² believers are on the Earth praying after the sixth and seventh seals have been opened and at the time the first four trumpets are about to sound. Also in Revelation,³ the harvest of the believers does not occur until *after* the beast—the Antichrist—has appeared upon the Earth.⁴ These are but some of the problems with the doctrine of pre-tribulation rapture.

Analysis of the Post-tribulation Rapture

What, then, about post-tribulation rapture? While 1 Corinthians⁵ is some ground for such an understanding, other verses directly contradict this doctrine as well. For example, the previously mentioned verses in Luke⁶ tell us that it is possible to escape all the endtime troubles.

¹ Luke 21:34-36

² Rev. 8:3-4

³ Rev. 14:14-16

⁴ Rev. 14:9-11

⁵ 1 Cor. 15:52

⁶ Luke 21:34-36

In addition, consider the epistle to the church in Philadelphia in Revelation. There,¹ the Lord says that He will keep the church in Philadelphia from the time of trial that is about to come upon the whole inhabited Earth.

Furthermore, as we look at the gospels of Matthew² and Luke,³ it is evident that some are taken before the tribulation. So, the doctrine of post-tribulation rapture is also problematic.

Other Difficulties

In addition to these, there are other verses that can cause more confusion. In Matthew, the Lord tells us that no man knows the day or the hour of His return.⁴ Indeed, not even He knows that time. However, in 1 Corinthians,⁵ Paul informs us that it will occur at the last trumpet. It *appears* that he knew the time, and by revealing that, we all know the time. So, do we know the time or not?

Furthermore, the Lord says that one is taken and one is left.⁶ Yet, in 1 Thessalonians,⁷ Paul says the living will be caught up with the resurrected believers. So, are all taken or not?

These are some of the seeming contradictions in the Bible concerning the rapture that cause so much confusion among the saints.

¹ Rev. 3:10

² Mat. 24:40-41

³ Luke 17:34-35

⁴ Matt. 24:42, 44

⁵ 1 Cor. 15:52

⁶ Matt. 24:40-41

⁷ 1 Thes. 4:15-17

In the Forest

At this point, you may be thoroughly confused and befuddled by what you have read. You may wonder what is true and what is not. You may even consider it best to simply give up this matter altogether.

In truth, we are in the thickest part of the forest, with barely any light passing through the forest leaves to illuminate us. But, there is hope and there is truth. Let us find our way out of this thicket and into the clarity of a brilliant day.

Seeing All Sides

It is often the case that Christians latch onto one or two verses that show one side of the truth, but then ignore those verses that reveal the other side.

For example, there are verses that tell us we are predestined by God to salvation.¹ Yet, there are others that tell us we have a free will to choose.² How can both of these be true?

I do not know the answer to that. However, I do know they *are* both true because the Bible tells me so. This shows there are two sides to Biblical truth. We must embrace all sides of the truth, even if we cannot understand how some things could be possible.

Even in the physical realm, there are apparent contradictions that cannot be explained but are nevertheless true.³

The rapture is similar to this. If we embrace some verses, but neglect others, we arrive at *part* of the truth—such as pre- or post-

¹ Rom. 8:30; Eph. 1:5, 11

² Rev. 22:17

³ There are two theories used to describe the behavior of the universe: quantum mechanics and relativity. The first details the behavior of extremely small objects, while the second describes large and extremely large objects. However, they are incompatible, and cannot both be true. Yet, they both seem to be.

tribulation rapture—but miss the mark of the full truth. Wanting something to be true, like pre-tribulation rapture, does not make it so. We must open to the Word, and receive all it has to reveal.

The Secret

Concerning the rapture, there is a secret hidden in the Bible, which resolves all the problems, contradictions, and confusion we have seen. It is found in Matthew 13. There, the Lord Jesus tells us that the harvest is the end of the age.¹

But, the harvest of what? The harvest of the seed of life that He sowed² into the believers when He was on the Earth. That life has been growing in us, slowly maturing in us that we might become full-grown sons of God.³ With this understanding, we can see that *there is no set time for the Lord to return*. He will return when *the harvest is ripe*.

Furthermore, as with any field of grain, some of the grain ripens first, and then the rest follows. So it is with the believers. Some seek Christ, love Him, desire Him, receive Him, open themselves to Him, and spend time with Him in prayer and fellowship.

This gaining of Christ by taking Him in is like the sun shining and the rain falling upon the field. Where the sun shines and the rain falls, the grain ripens.

In addition, these believers have spent the time to till the ground of their hearts,⁴ ridding it of all rocks,⁵ weeds, and thorns,⁶ so that the grain of the divine life might thrive, grow, and mature.

¹ Matt. 13:39

² Matt. 13:3, 19, 24, 30, 37

³ Col. 1:28

⁴ Matt. 13:19

⁵ Matt. 13:20-21

⁶ Matt. 13:23

This is true of the harvest: the grain that grows in good earth grows quickly and richly, while the grain that grows in poor, stony earth surrounded by thorns and thistles grows poorly, slowly, and may not reach maturity at all.

This is a description of us, the believers. We are the ground. The Lord, as the seed of life, has been sown into us. If our ground is prepared properly, and we are open to the shining of the Lord and the watering of His Spirit, that seed of life in us will grow to maturity. This is what it means to be ready for the Lord's return—it is to be fully matured in the divine life, to have Christ formed within us.¹

Firstfruits and Harvest

This is what will happen at the end of this age. At that time, the Lord will first come as a thief.² That is, He will come in a secret way, in a hidden way, for the mature believers. No one knows when this will occur.

Those in whom the seed of the divine life has fully developed at the time of the Lord's secret coming will be taken; the ones in whom the seed of life has not matured will be left on the Earth to pass through the tribulation *to help them mature*.

Those who are taken are firstfruits; the ones left behind are the majority of the harvest. Both of these are seen in Revelation 14. In verses 1-5, we see the firstfruits; in verses 14-16, we see the harvest. In between, we see the tribulation.³

¹ Gal. 4:19

² Matt. 24:43

³ Rev. 14:6-12

Conundrums Explained

This understanding explains all the conundrums concerning the rapture. The firstfruits of the harvest are taken before the tribulation;¹ the ones who are counted worthy are taken and escape all the endtime troubles;² the ones in the field and at the mill are taken before the tribulation as well.³

However, *all* those who are unprepared—those who have *not* matured in the divine life, who are *not* ready for the Lord, who have *not* been watchful and prayerful, who have *not* gained the Lord as they should have—will be left behind to pass through the tribulation.

Some might object to this based upon 1 Thessalonians.⁴ They might claim that there it says those who are alive are taken. They might claim that this is a clear word indicating there is no such thing as some believers being taken and some believers being left.

However, there is a key phrase in these verses in Thessalonians that is often overlooked. There, the Apostle Paul uses the phrase, “that are left.” He twice says, “we that are alive, that are left.” This indicates that there will be some who are alive *who are not left* before that time.

The Apostle was not being redundant in his speaking. He was not speaking the same thing in two different ways—we that are alive and we that are left. No, rather, he was emphasizing that some will be taken and some will be left. Rather than evidence that all the believers are taken together, these verses prove just the opposite—that some living believers are taken before others.

¹ Rev. 14:4, 6, 9-11

² Luke 21:34-36

³ Matt. 24:40-41

⁴ 1 Thes. 4:15-17

Simple Logic

Even logically speaking, this is reasonable. Is a little child fit to rule? Is the one who is immoral fit to reign over others? Furthermore, if we cannot rule over our own temper, how can we rule over others? If we cannot rule over the lust of the flesh, how can we reign in the coming kingdom? No, brothers and sisters, the Lord will only take those who are ready and mature, and will leave the rest to ripen under the hot sun of the endtime tribulation. That great suffering will be like the heat of a furnace, causing the believers to dry out of all the worldly water, and to ripen.

Satan's Deception

Finally, consider this. Only one of these understandings can be true. They *cannot* all be true, since they are, by definition, mutually exclusive. If one is true, then the others must be false by definition.

We know the false ones must be from the evil one. But, which of these is true and which are evil? Let us consider the consequences of each.

The Effects of Pre-tribulation Doctrine

The pre-tribulation rapture doctrine teaches us that we all will be taken before the tribulation comes upon the Earth, no matter what our condition or stage of growth in the divine life. This leads to spiritual complacency: since we are all taken, there is no need to go forward, to press on, to reach the goal toward which the apostle Paul stretched.¹ Consequently, this doctrine lulls us into a state of being that is contrary to what is espoused in the New Testament.

¹ Phil. 3:13-14

I know of believers who hold this doctrine and who have done so for many years—even decades. They have been lulled into a kind of stupor in which they believe everything is fine. They have remained spiritual children, and do not even realize the *need* for them to grow in the divine life.

The Effects of Post-tribulation Doctrine

The post-tribulation rapture doctrine has a similar effect, although for a different reason. If we are all going to pass through the endtime tribulation, no matter what our condition is, why should we press forward at this time? Whatever is necessary will take place during the endtime. It would even seem that it is better to die now than to look and wait for the Lord's second coming.

This also issues in a sense of complacency. There is no promise of reward, and hence, no urgency to attain that reward. This doctrine may even lead believers into despondency: no matter what they do or how they behave, they will have to pass through the tribulation if the Lord returns.

Rather than encourage the believers forward to Christ, it may actually lead the believers to hope the Lord does not return in their lifetime!

The Effects of Partial Rapture Teaching

The teaching that only the prepared will be taken before the tribulation incentivizes and encourages the believers to seek Christ, to gain Christ, and to grow in Christ to be mature when the Lord returns. It issues in a state of urgency to use every opportunity to gain Christ.

This was the apostle Paul's way in his life. He told us clearly in Philippians:¹ "Brethren, I count not myself yet to have laid hold: but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded." He saw a need to press on and stretch forward to gain the prize. Not everyone is so minded, and therefore not everyone will obtain this prize.

Consider Again

Let us look at this in another way. Would the devil want you unprepared for the Lord's return, when in fact you needed to be prepared? Or, would he want you to be prepared when you did not need to be prepared? Think about this. This should make the matter of the rapture transparent. Clearly, the devil would want us unprepared when we needed to be.

Truth or Lie

If we look with clear and unbiased eyes at these three beliefs concerning the rapture and the effects each has upon the hearts of the believers, which of these is from God, and which are from the evil one? Which of these is according to Scripture and which are not? The answer should be evident.

In the light of what we have just seen, we should realize that both the post- and pre-tribulation rapture doctrines are partly true and partly false. It is true that Christians will be taken before the endtime troubles. But, it is not true that *all* the Christians will be taken. Similarly, it is true that Christians will be taken at the very end of the tribulation. But, it is false that *all* Christians will be taken

¹ Phil. 3:13-15

at that time. The ones who are ready will be taken before the endtime troubles, while the ones who are not will be left to pass through them to help them mature. They will be taken at the very end of this age.

It might be extremely difficult to accept the truth of the need to be prepared for the Lord's return. We may have held a contrary teaching for quite some time. To accept our need to prepare for the Lord's return might mean accepting that we have wasted many years in a lie, years that we could have used to grow far more quickly in Christ. However, continuing to believe a lie will only stunt our growth even more. As Paul exhorted us, let us redeem the time!¹ Let us drop the things that hinder our progress in Christ, and begin anew to run after the Lord and the prize He has set before us.

The Lord's Heart

We must know that the Lord desires *every one* of His children to mature in this age before the end comes. Just as a human father does not want to discipline his children, so it is not the Lord's desire to discipline or punish us. He truly wants and greatly desires each of us to be watchful and ready for His return.

The time of trial² that is about to come upon the Earth is not meant for the believers; it is for Israel and the nations. However, God will use it to help His children mature as well, when that is needed. His great love for us requires Him to do everything possible to bring us to full maturity in His life.

What Shall We Do?

If we see that growth in Christ is crucial both to our future *and to the Lord*, we may be perplexed as to how we should proceed.

¹ Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5

² Rev. 3:10

We may never have received the help we need to establish and develop a Christian life that promotes growth in Christ. Here are a few of the practices that will help us in our long Christian journey.

Prayer

The most crucial item in the Christian life is prayer. Prayer is paramount. Without prayer, it is impossible to mature in Christ. Prayer is the absolute necessity of a proper Christian living. Remember what the Lord told us in Luke:¹ Watch at all seasons, making supplication, that we may escape all the things about to come upon the Earth and stand before Him. Prayer is the prerequisite to going forward toward our goal.

We must develop the habit of prayer. Start by setting a time aside early in the morning for prayer. Shut yourself away from all distractions. In that place alone with Him, begin speaking to the dear Lord Jesus. Confess and repent of whatever stands between you and Him, as He shines upon any offenses or hindrances. Speak to Him from your heart. More importantly, open to receive from Him what is in His heart that you might pray that back to Him. Continue for at least half an hour, or even an hour if possible. Do this day after day until it has become part of you, until you *must* pray every morning.

Also, exercise to touch the Lord Jesus in prayer during the day. Develop an ongoing conversation with Him, speaking to Him of the needs you see for others or for your own needs, crying out to Him for mercy when you see the suffering happening upon the Earth, petitioning Him to right the wrongs that He shows you, weeping before Him for your own pitiful condition and lack of growth in Him. There is simply too much to pray for. We must cultivate a moment by moment interaction with our wonderful Lord.

¹ Luke 21:36

Calling Upon the Name of the Lord

Many Christians have never even heard of calling upon the Lord's name, but it is a great matter in the Bible.¹ This is the simplest and shortest of prayers: "Lord Jesus. O, Lord Jesus!" This practice is also something we can and should nurture. It was the way of the early Christians to call upon the Lord in every place.² We all should follow their lead. By calling, we are contacting the Lord and drinking of Him.³ This will be a great help to us in our Christian life.

Reading the Bible

Let us also spend time reading the Bible. Start with the New Testament, then proceed to the Old. Read the most important parts of the Bible repeatedly: the Gospels, the epistles to the believers of Paul, Peter, and John, and Revelation. This will provide us with a solid foundation in the Word.

The Proper Ministry

Learn to discern healthy teaching from that which is not, and then receive the healthy ministry. Healthy teaching brings us to Christ, imparts His life into us, illuminates God's purpose, separates us from the world, and exposes the evil one. It does not teach us to perfect ourselves. It does not lead us to do many great works. Furthermore, it does not promote any person, religion, or practice. Rather, it centers upon Christ and leads the believers to Him.

¹ Gen. 4:26; 1 Kings 18:24, 36; 2 Kings 5:11; Psalms 80:18-19, 99:6, 105:1, 116:17; Acts 2:21, 9:14; Rom. 10:13

² 1 Cor. 1:2

³ Psalms 116:13

Fellowship With Believers

Fellowship among the believers is also vital to our Christian progress. Spend time with those who are seeking the Lord, pouring out what you have received from Him and, in turn, taking in what they have gained of Christ. This practice and enjoyment will speed the growth of the inner divine life.

Gain from the experiences of the older saints you know. Their seeking of Christ and the lessons they have learned may be of great value.

Pour out to the younger ones for their needs and edification. In so doing, you will find yourself greatly enriched as well.

Christ Is All

In everything—whether prayer, reading, fellowship, service, or any other aspect of the Christian life—seek Christ. He is all and in all.¹ If we are faithful to do so, He will be enabled to bring us to the goal of our Christian life and prepare us for His return. By His mercy and grace, we will stand before Him in that day before our Father.²



¹ Col. 3:11

² Rev. 14:1-5