



I Believe in the Pre-Tribulation Rapture

By: Stanley M. Horton

Why do I believe the Rapture will take place before the coming Great Tribulation? I confess I once believed it because that was what I had been taught. No one in Pentecostal circles where I grew up questioned it.

With excited anticipation we did what the Bible called on us to do. We encouraged each other with the words of 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17. Jesus will come. The dead in Christ will rise first. Then those of us who are still alive and in Christ will be caught up together with them in one body for that meeting in the air. I still feel a thrill whenever I think about this.

My first contact with another opinion came when a brother gave me a tract entitled, 100 Reasons Why the Church Will Go Through the Tribulation. I found that the 100 reasons boiled down to one: God has not promised that the Church will escape tribulation. This bothered me until the Holy Spirit directed my attention to 1 Thessalonians 5:9 — that God has not appointed us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a difference between the tribulation caused by people or Satan because of our witness in this age and the wrath that comes from God on an unbelieving world at the end of the age.

Two things I saw encouraged me. One was that the salvation talked about here was the inheritance we shall receive when we are caught away, changed, and receive our new bodies that cannot be touched by decay or death. The other thing I saw was that the wrath in this context is the wrath that comes on those who belong to the darkness of this world, those who will be left behind when the Church is caught away.

I saw further that the judgments of the Tribulation period at the end of this age are specifically called wrath (Revelation 6:16,17; 15:7; 16:1). Further, the plagues or judgments of God's wrath are such that no one could be anywhere on earth without feeling at least some of their effects. Clearly the Church will not be present. I noticed too in Revelation 9:20,21 that the rest of mankind who are not killed by the plagues do not repent. In other words, the only people left on earth will be unrepentant. Again, the Church will not be present.

In view of these facts as well as the fact the Church is not mentioned as being on earth in Revelation 4 through 19, some have suggested that when John saw a door opened in heaven (Revelation 4:1), this was a symbolic expression for the catching away of the Church. I have had to admit, however, that this is reading something into Revelation 4:1 that the Bible does not specifically mention at that point. However, the case for the pre-Tribulation Rapture does not rest on that interpretation.

Three things are more important.

First, the teachings and parables of Jesus urge us to be on the watch, be alert, be on guard, so that we are not found in a careless or sinful state when He comes. It is the evil servant who says, "My Lord delayeth his coming," and begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with the drunken (Matthew 24:48). Our Lord's coming will take such people by surprise. But those who keep busy about the Lord's work will not be surprised, for they will be ready (1 Thessalonians 5:4–11).

Second, Jesus made it clear that when He returns, it will be as in the days of Noah. The people heard the preaching of Noah; but the day the Flood came, they had their plans made. They supposed that day would be the same as any other day. But that day the judgments began to fall.

Jesus further showed that when He comes, people will be going about their regular daily tasks. There will be no separation in this between believers and unbelievers, no mark of the beast yet. Of two working together, one will be “taken” to be with Jesus in the Rapture. The other will be left behind to suffer the judgments of the Tribulation (Matthew 24:37–41). It is not likely that everything will be business as usual during the Great Tribulation. Thus this separation has to take place before the Tribulation.

Third, Jesus emphasized that no one except the Father knows the day or the hour of His coming (Matthew 24:36). The times and the seasons, the days and the dates are all in the Father’s hands (Acts 1:7).

Even Jesus while on earth chose not to know them. Thus He did not tell everything in exact order. The word “then” in Matthew 24:30 is a general word and means that here are some of the things that are going to occur, but not necessarily in order. So the order in which events are mentioned is not necessarily the order in which they will take place.

Second Thessalonians 2:3 shows, however, that the first things to happen on the Day of the Lord will be a falling away or rebellion and the revelation of the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist. Since these things have not happened, we know that the Day of the Lord with its judgments has not yet begun, and we can still expect the Rapture to take place before they do.

Actually much more could be said to show that the pre-Tribulation Rapture fits the New Testament teachings as a whole better than any other view. Yet our business is not to concern ourselves so much about times and seasons as about the Great Commission. Acts 1:8 is our responsibility. Jesus wants to find us so doing. Let us give ourselves to the task. Then if Jesus comes in the midst of it, or whenever He comes, we shall surely hear His “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

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