

# 4.14 - Rapture

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### CONTENTS

- [4.14.1 - Is there a Rapture?](#)
- [4.14.2 - What is the Rapture?](#)
- [4.14.3 - How Many Comings of Christ?](#)
- [4.14.4 - The Holy Spirit and the Rapture](#)
- [4.14.5 - Is all Tribulation the Same?](#)
- [4.14.6 - Delivered from the Wrath to Come](#)
- [4.14.7 - The Church and the book of Revelation](#)
- [4.14.8 - The Timing of the Rapture](#)
- [4.14.9 - Typology and the Rapture](#)
- [4.14.10 - Additional Resources on the Rapture](#)

One of the significant things any interpreter of the book of Revelation will notice is the abrupt shift in focus which takes place between chapters three and four. Chapters two and three, which describe “the things which are” (Rev. 1:19<sup>±</sup>), are focused entirely on the *Church*. Then, abruptly, chapter four opens, John ascends to heaven “in the Spirit,” and the Church is no longer mentioned until the close of the book. This shift in focus and absence of all mention of the Church would in itself be somewhat remarkable. But when it is combined with what Scripture elsewhere teaches concerning the character and destiny of the Church, it provides additional evidence that the Church will not be present on the earth during the events of Revelation 4<sup>±</sup> through Revelation 19<sup>±</sup>, including the period of the [tribulation](#).

Twenty-four verses in the book of Revelation refer to the church. . . . Twenty of the 24 verses refer to the church in the present church age (Rev. 1:4<sup>±</sup>, 11<sup>±</sup>, 20<sup>±</sup>; 2:1<sup>±</sup>, 7<sup>±</sup>, 8<sup>±</sup>, 11<sup>±</sup>, 12<sup>±</sup>, 17<sup>±</sup>, 18<sup>±</sup>, 23<sup>±</sup>, 29<sup>±</sup>; 3:1<sup>±</sup>, 6<sup>±</sup>, 7<sup>±</sup>, 13<sup>±</sup>, 14<sup>±</sup>, 22<sup>±</sup>; 22:16<sup>±</sup>, 17<sup>±</sup>). Two verses refer to the church in the marriage of the Lamb, which will take place *in heaven*, not on the earth (Rev. 19:7<sup>±</sup>, 8<sup>±</sup>). Two verses refer to the church in the eternal state (Rev. 21:2<sup>±</sup>, 9<sup>±</sup>). It is important to note that there are no references to the church *on the earth* in chapters 4 through 18, the chapters relating specifically to the 70th week of Daniel 9, including the seals, trumpets, and bowls.<sup>1</sup>

The church is mentioned 17 times in the first three chapters of Revelation, but after John (a member of the church) is called up to heaven at the beginning of chapter 4, he looks down on the events of the Tribulation, and the church is not mentioned or seen again until chapter 19, when she returns to the earth with her Bridegroom at His glorious appearing. Why? The answer is obvious: *She isn't in the Tribulation*. She is raptured to be with her Lord before it begins.<sup>2</sup>

In our day, the [Rapture](#) has come under attack by many. Some think it represents the novel teachings of “defeatist Christians.” Others think it is pure fantasy. Still others seem to savor the idea of the Church going through the events of the Tribulation in order to “prove her metal” or refine her. We find it difficult to understand why there is such opposition *by Christians* to the idea that the bridegroom would come for His bride prior to pouring forth His wrath (John 14:1-3)?

If the Church is to come through the tribulation judgments that are to come upon the earth, then, say it plainly, there is no blessed hope in the Bible.<sup>3</sup>

So determined, however, are many not to have this blessed hope, or even to allow others to have it, that they would rather hold that this “great and terrible day of the Lord” is our only “hope” and (!) thus be driven to interpret the “thief” [Rev. 3:3<sup>±</sup>] or Christ coming as a friend to fetch us away as he *steals* precious jewels. And this is done in the face of the opposite statement in 1 Thessalonians 5:4, that day shall “not come as a thief” on the church. . . . this thief is to be watched *against*: but Christ is to be watched *for*!<sup>4</sup>

Our treatment of the subject here is not intended to be exhaustive by any means—this is a commentary on the book of Revelation, not a book on the Rapture. However, the Rapture is an important aspect of understanding the Revelation given by John and especially the [nature](#) and [purpose](#) of the Tribulation period which it describes. In what follows, we outline aspects of the Rapture which are relevant to understanding the book of Revelation and mention additional resources for further study by the interested reader.

### 4.14.1 - Is there a Rapture?

A frequently-heard statement by Christians is, “There’s no [rapture](#) mentioned in the Bible!” As we shall see, this is an inaccurate statement on two counts:

1. The term “rapture” *is* a biblical term.
2. The teaching of the Rapture is found in Scripture even if the term is absent.

In the first case, we need to recognize that “the Bible” has changed form over time. Originally, the Bible was written in Hebrew and Greek. But for most of the history of the Church, the Bible used by the majority of people was not in these original languages. Instead, people used a translation in their native language, just as we use an English translation today. And for the greater part of the history of the Church, the translation used by most in the West was the *Latin Vulgate*. This was “the Bible” for over a thousand years—and dominated Bible study and doctrine for a period far longer than any other translation.<sup>5</sup> It reigned supreme in the West until the time of the Reformation when men began to return to study the original language texts and translate them into the vulgare tongues (e.g., German, English). The term *rapture* means “to seize” and “to carry off,” and is taken from the phrase “caught up” in 1Th. 4:17 in the Latin Vulgate which reads:

Deinde nos, qui vivimus, qui relinquimur, simul **rapiemur** cum illis in nubibus obviam Christo in aera, et sic semper cum Domino erimus. [Then we, who are alive, who remain, together will be **caught up** with them in the clouds to meet Christ in the air, and so always with the Lord we will be.] [emphasis added]

So we see that the term “rapture” is in the Bible—it just depends *which* Bible you are talking about! If you mean one of the recent translations which have only been on the scene for *decades*, or even the KJV which is *hundreds* of years old, then you won’t find the term. But if you are talking about the Grand Daddy of all Bibles which ruled for a millennium (the Vulgate), then the term is indeed there! Even if we could not find the actual term “rapture” in a Bible, it would not indicate that the *doctrine* of the Rapture is not taught within Scripture. After all, we don’t find the terms *Trinity*, *omnipresence*, or *omniscience* in Scripture, but these doctrines are clearly taught by Scripture. So all that is necessary to establish the truth of a teaching is whether the *concept* is found in Scripture. Here too, the Rapture passes the test.

#### 4.14.2 - What is the Rapture?

If we go back to the original language of the New Testament, we find the *rapiemur* of 1Th. 4:17 in the *Vulgate* to be a translation of the Greek term *ἁρπαγόμεθα* [harpagōmetha] which is the 1st person, plural, future tense, passive voice, indicative mood form of the verb *ἁρπάζω* [harpazō] meaning to “snatch, seize, i.e., take suddenly and vehemently”<sup>6</sup> and which can denote “rescue from a threatening danger.”<sup>7</sup> In general usage, it describes: how violent men take the kingdom by force (Mat. 11:12); carrying off property from the strong man’s house (Mat. 12:29); how the evil one snatches away what has been sown (Mat. 13:19); or how the people approached Jesus to take Him by force and make Him king (John 6:15). The term is also used of supernatural events where God takes people in the Spirit and transports them either physically or in a vision. Philip was *caught away* from the Ethiopian eunuch to Azotus (Acts 8:39), the Apostle Paul was *caught up* to the third heaven (2Cor. 12:2), and those who are alive and remain will be *caught up* to meet Christ in the air (1Cor. 15:51-52; 1Th. 4:17). The same term is used to describe the ascension of Christ who was *caught up* to God and His throne (Rev. 12:5+). When we extend our study of this “catching away” to include the Old Testament, we find numerous *rapture* events including: Enoch (Gen. 5); Elijah (2K. 2); Isaiah (Isa. 6); Jesus (Acts 1:11; Rev. 12:5+); Philip (Acts 8); Paul (2Cor. 12); The Church (1Th. 4); and the Two Witnesses (Rev. 11+).<sup>8</sup>

The Scriptures present six raptures. Four have already taken place. Two are still to come. . . . The four raptures that have taken place include when both Enoch and Elijah who were taken up from earth to heaven without experiencing death (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5; 2K. 2:1, 11), when the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven after His death and resurrection (Mark 16:19; Acts 1:9-11; Rev. 12:5+), and when Paul referred to the rapture of a man (probably Paul himself) to the third heaven (2Cor. 12:2-4). . . . The other future rapture [besides that of the church, 1Th. 4:17] will occur when the two witnesses of the future Tribulation period ascend to heaven after God has resurrected them from the dead (Rev. 11:3+, 11-12+).<sup>9</sup>

The Rapture, in the sense we are using the term, is the “catching away” of persons to a new location by the power of God without their initiation or control. We are specifically interested in the Rapture of the Church—the event which describes the translation of the living and dead in Christ to be caught up in the clouds forever to be with Him (1Th. 4:17).

#### 4.14.3 - How Many Comings of Christ?

Typically, we speak of only two “comings” of Christ. The First Coming was His virgin birth by Mary and subsequent ministry which ended at the cross and His ascension. The Second Coming will be at the end of the age to judge evil and establish His kingdom. So far, so good. But how are we to understand the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost? After all, Christ said:

And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. **I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.** (John 14:16-18) [emphasis added]

Elsewhere, we see that the Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom. 8:9; 1Pe. 1:11). So in a sense, “Christ came” on the Day of

Pentecost for it was His Spirit which breathed life into a new creation on that day: the *Body of Christ* (1Cor. 12:13). If we include this “coming,” we have at least *three* comings of Christ—two *physical* and one *spiritual*. We know these three comings are all different because of differences in the situations which attend each event. What we are doing here is analogous to the way we study “coming” passages in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, we notice some passages which describe the coming Messiah as a victorious king (e.g., Ps. 2; Isa. 9:6) and other passages which describe Him as a suffering servant (e.g., Ps. 22; Isa. 53). How are we to reconcile these differences? One solution, taken by many who reject Christ, is to assume these passages describe two different individuals. The correct solution, which we understand from the New Testament, is to understand that a *single individual* is in view, but He comes *multiple times*. At His First Coming, He is the suffering servant. At His Second Coming<sup>10</sup> He is the victorious King who will reign eternally. As Christians studying the Old Testament, we think nothing strange in noticing the irreconcilable differences between these “coming” passages and understand them as describing *different events*. This same situation occurs when a careful study is made of the many “coming” passages within the New Testament which describe His *future* coming. The “coming” passages differ in numerous ways which make it impossible to see them all describing the same event.

#### 4.14.3.1 - Rapture versus Second Coming

The following contrasts are found in passages describing the coming of Christ. We suggest that these differences are an indication that different comings are in view: the coming of Christ as [bridegroom](#) for His expectant Church (the [Rapture](#)) versus the Second Coming of Christ upon an unbelieving world in judgment.

Contrasts Between the Rapture and the Second Coming

Rapture	Second Coming
Christ comes for His own (John 14:3; 1Th. 5:28; 2Th. 2:1).	Christ comes with His own (1Th. 3:13; Jude 1:14; Rev. 19:14 <sup>+</sup> ). <sup>11</sup>
Christ comes in the air (1Th. 4:17).	Christ comes to the earth (Zec. 14:4; Acts 1:11) <sup>12</sup>
Christ claims His bride (1Th. 4:16-17).	Christ comes with His bride (Rev. 19:6-14 <sup>+</sup> ). <sup>13</sup>
Removal of believers (1Th. 4:17).	Manifestation of Christ (Mal. 4:2) <sup>14</sup>
Only His own see Him (1Th. 4:13-18).	Every eye shall see Him (Rev. 1:7 <sup>+</sup> ). <sup>15</sup>
Tribulation begins (2Th. 1:6-9).	Millennial Kingdom begins (Rev. 20:1-7 <sup>+</sup> ). <sup>16</sup>
Saved are delivered from wrath (1Th. 1:10; 1Th. 5:9).	Unsaved experience the wrath of God (Rev. 6:12-17 <sup>+</sup> ). <sup>17</sup>
No signs precede rapture (1Th. 5:1-3).	Signs precede Second Coming (Luke 21:11, 15). <sup>18</sup>
Focus is Lord and Church (1Th. 4:13-18).	Focus is Israel and kingdom (Mat. 24:14). <sup>19</sup>
World is deceived (2Th. 2:3-12).	Satan is bound so he cannot deceive (Rev. 20:1-2 <sup>+</sup> ). <sup>20</sup>
Believers depart the earth (1Th. 4:15-17) <sup>21</sup>	Unbelievers are taken away from the earth (Mat. 24:37-41). <sup>22</sup>
Unbelievers remain on earth.	Believers remain on earth (Mat. 25:34). <sup>23</sup>
No mention of establishing Christ's Kingdom on earth.	Christ has come to set up His Kingdom on earth (Mat. 25:31, 34). <sup>24</sup>
Christians taken to the Father's house (John 14:1-3).	Resurrected saints do not see the Father's house (Rev. 20:4 <sup>+</sup> ). <sup>25</sup>
<a href="#">Imminent</a> —could happen at any moment.	Cannot occur for at least 7 years <sup>26</sup>
Precedes the career of the man of sin. (2Th. 2:1-3).	Terminates the career of the man of sin (Rev. 19:20 <sup>+</sup> ).

#### 4.14.4 - The Holy Spirit and the Rapture

An important aspect concerning the [Rapture](#) is the unique relationship between the Holy Spirit and the *Body of Christ* which was created on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came in a new way to earth. While it is beyond the scope of our treatment here

to tackle this subject in-depth, several important points should be noted.

#### 4.14.4.1 - The Coming of the Spirit

1. The Holy Spirit has always been present and ministering upon the earth (Gen. 1:2).
2. Prior to the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit *came upon* and *filled* believers (Num. 24:2; Jdg. 3:10; 6:34; 1S. 10:6; 19:20; 2Chr. 15:2; 20:14; Luke 1:67), but His presence was not permanent (1S. 16:13-14; Ps. 51:11).
3. Prior to the Day of Pentecost, John explains that the Holy Spirit “had not yet been given *because* Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39). Notice that the Holy Spirit has always been omnipresent and ministering upon the earth, but John clearly says at that time that He “had not yet been given” (John 14:16).
4. The Holy Spirit came to the earth to begin a new ministry on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4, 17; 11:15).
5. The new ministry of the Holy Spirit during this, the church age, is baptizing believers into the Body of Christ (1Cor. 12:5, 12-13) wherein believers are *permanently* indwelt and sealed with the Spirit (2Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30).

It is important to grasp two aspects regarding this important transition which took place on the Day of Pentecost:

- The Holy Spirit ministered on earth before the formation of the Church *and He will continue to minister on the earth after the departure of the Church at the [Rapture](#)*.
- The Holy Spirit never *permanently* indwelt believers prior to the Day of Pentecost. The Church is a unique spiritual organism which began on the Day of Pentecost and which has a unique relationship to the Spirit.

As you can see, there are elements of *continuity* and *discontinuity* which attend the Day of Pentecost. This is important to grasp because these same elements of continuity and discontinuity attend the Rapture of the Church when the Holy Spirit is removed from the earth *in the sense He came at Pentecost* but continues to minister upon the earth in the Tribulation period in the same sense He did prior to the Day of Pentecost. His “coming” on the Day of Pentecost and subsequent “removal” at the Rapture of the Church has no effect upon His role in salvation. Salvation has always been by grace through faith alone and by spiritual regeneration in which the Holy Spirit plays a key role (John 3:5-8; Gal. 4:29). For a more detailed discussion of the significance of the Day of Pentecost in relation to the ministry of the Holy Spirit, see [Tony Garland, “[Does Dispensationalism Teach Two Ways of Salvation?.](#)” in [The Conservative Theological Journal](#), vol. 7 no. 20 (Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Theological Seminary, March 2003), 58-59].

#### 4.14.4.2 - Who is the Restrainer?

In a key passage concerning “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,” Paul relates that the Day of Christ ([NU—Day of the Lord](#)) cannot come unless the man of sin is revealed (2Th. 2:1-4) and that the man of sin was being actively restrained at the time Paul wrote.

And now you know **what** is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only **He** who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way. (2Th. 2:6-7) [emphasis added]

The Restrainer is referred to both in the neuter (*what*) and masculine (*he*) gender. This mix of gender appears in relation to the Holy Spirit Who is a *person*, but also described using a Greek term which is neuter in gender ([πνεῦμα](#) [pneuma]). It is also said that the Restrainer “now restrains” and will continue to do so until “He is taken out of the way.” Since the man of sin has yet to be revealed<sup>27</sup> we can infer that the Restrainer, whoever or whatever he is, has been effectively suppressing the revelation of the man of sin for over 2000 years. When we collect the pieces of evidence concerning the identity of the Restrainer, we find:

- The Restrainer is referred to as both neuter ([τὸ κατέχον](#) [to katechon], “*what* is restraining”) and masculine ([ὁ κατέχων](#) [ho katechōn], “*He* who now restrains”).
- The Restrainer existed in Paul’s day.
- The Restrainer has been continually and effectively restraining for nearly 2,000 years so far.
- The Restrainer is powerful enough to suppress the spiritual powers of darkness seeking to promote the man of sin.
- The restraint is *global*.

Numerous suggestions have been made concerning the identity of the Restrainer:

Several of these views do not necessarily involve a supernatural force. These include the Jewish state and James, Paul and the preaching of the gospel, the Roman Empire, and human government. Other views may be grouped as hostile supernatural views, which include Satan, a hostile false prophet, a general hostile force in the form of the mystery of lawlessness and human government, and the preincarnate state of the man of lawlessness. In several views [ὁ κατέχων](#) [ho katechōn] is seen as a benevolent supernatural figure rather than a hostile one. Usually an angel, such as Michael, or another type of heavenly being, such as Elijah, or

a mythological being, is suggested. The most common supernatural figure suggested, though, is God Himself.<sup>28</sup>

Of the various suggestions, it would seem that the Restrainer must be supernatural in power. For what government could restrain Satan and do so continuously for 2,000 years? Yet, Scripture indicates that the Holy Spirit had just such a ministry (Gen. 6:3; 20:6; John 16:18). It seems the best solution for the identity of the Restrainer is the Holy Spirit Himself. “The first participle ([τ. κατέχο](#) [to katecho]) conforms to the gender of [πνεύμα](#) [pneuma]. The second participle [κατέχων](#) [ho katechōn] confirms the personality of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>29</sup> If this is so, this has significant implications concerning the [Rapture](#) of the Church because we previously saw that the Holy Spirit indwells those who are baptized into the Body of Christ *permanently* for the day of redemption. It is impossible that the Holy Spirit could depart from indwelling the sealed believer—He cannot be taken out of the way *unless all born-again believers indwelt by Him are taken with Him!*

The Holy Spirit came down into the world at Pentecost in a special sense in which He had never been in the world, to dwell in the Church, the body of believers which is called the temple of the Holy Spirit (1Cor. 6:19). When all believers are removed to heaven according to the promise made to the church in Philadelphia (Rev. 3:10<sup>+</sup>), . . . the Holy Spirit goes out of the world in the sense that He came into it at Pentecost.<sup>30</sup>

This was precisely Paul’s point in his letter to the Thessalonians. Some of them thought that they had already entered the Day of the Lord, but Paul reassures them that this could not be the case for the man of sin must first be revealed and he will not be revealed until the Restrainer has been taken out of the way. The Thessalonian believers would be “gathered together” to Christ before the man of sin would be revealed.

Since the ministry of the Holy Spirit includes indwelling believers and working through the church, then [κ. μέσου γένηται](#) [ek mesou genētai] (“taken out of the way”) could possibly refer to the removal of the Holy Spirit through the removal of the church in the pretribulational rapture. Since the passage concerns the gathering of believers, this cryptic apocalyptic reference to the Spirit, who indwells the church, is probably in view. This would be an encouragement to the Thessalonian believers to stop being alarmed about any false teaching on the Day of the Lord.<sup>31</sup>

Who or what is restraining the satanically empowered movement against God’s law and is postponing the revelation of the man of sin? Some say it is the Roman Empire. But the empire has long vanished and “the holder back” is not yet revealed. Another suggestion is that this is Satan, but it is difficult to see why he would hold back sin. Others suggest that human governments are holding back sin and the revealing of the Antichrist. But human governments will not end prior to the Antichrist’s unveiling. Nor do all governments restrain sin; many encourage it! The Holy Spirit of God is the only Person with sufficient (supernatural) power to do this restraining. Some object to this being the Holy Spirit on the grounds that to katechon in 2 Thessalonians 2:6 is neuter (“what is holding back”). But this is no problem for two reasons: (a) The neuter is sometimes used of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14). (b) In 2 Thessalonians 2:7 the words are masculine: ho katechōn, the one who . . . holds it back. How does He do it? Through Christians, whom He indwells and through whom He works in society to hold back the swelling tide of lawless living. How will He be taken out of the way? When the church leaves the earth in the Rapture, the Holy Spirit will be taken out of the way in the sense that His unique lawlessness-restraining ministry through God’s people will be removed (cf. Gen. 6:3). The removal of the Restrainer at the time of the Rapture must obviously precede the day of the Lord. Paul’s reasoning is thus a strong argument for the pretribulational Rapture: the Thessalonians were not in the Great Tribulation because the Rapture had not yet occurred.<sup>32</sup>

Many suggestions have been made to identify the restraining force of 1Th. 4:6, 7. These include: (1) human government; (2) preaching of the gospel; (3) the binding of Satan; (4) the providence of God; (5) the Jewish state; (6) the church; (7) the Holy Spirit; and 8) Michael. Whatever now restrains the Antichrist of 1Th. 4:3, 4, 8-10 from being revealed in the fullness of his apostasy and evil, must be more than human or even angelic power.<sup>33</sup>

The restraint which has withheld the revelation of [Antichrist](#) all these years involves both the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Some understand the neuter [τ. κατέχον](#) [to katechon], (“*what* is restraining”) as denoting the Word of God, whereas [κατέχων](#) [ho katechōn], (“*He* who now restrains”) denotes the Holy Spirit. If so, the former may be the *means* by which the later *agent* performs His ministry through the Church.

Regarding the association of the Holy Spirit with the gospel, it might be said that neither the Spirit nor the gospel (or the Word of God) operate independently of each other. This is true of Creation when God spoke and the Spirit hovered over the waters (Gen. 1:1-3). The gospel came in power and in the Holy Spirit (1Th. 1:5). Sanctification comes through both the Word and the Spirit (cf. Ps. 119:9, 11; 1Th. 4:8; 2Th. 2:13; 2Ti. 3:16-17). The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God (Eph. 6:17).<sup>34</sup>

For a more detailed discussion of the identity of the Restrainer, see [BORROW Pentecost, [Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology](#), 259-263] and [Powell, [The Identity of the “Restrainer” in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7](#)].



#### 4.14.4.3 - How were People Saved before Pentecost?

We pause here to reiterate the point made earlier: people have *always* been saved by spiritual regeneration, being “born of the Spirit” (John 3:5-6). Yet John made it clear that the Holy Spirit “had not yet been given” prior to the Day of Pentecost (John 7:39). The new ministry of the Spirit which began on the Day of Pentecost was not that of *regeneration*, but of *baptism into the Body of Christ* (1Cor. 12:13). *Prior to the Day of Pentecost, believers were never baptized into the Body of Christ. Therefore, the Body of Christ is a new and unique organism ministering in Christ's absence during the present age.*

#### 4.14.4.4 - How are People Saved in the Tribulation?

When the Holy Spirit, as the Restrainer, is taken out of the way, the Body of Christ will go with Him, *but He will still minister on the earth to save souls during the Tribulation to follow.* In the same way He participated in regenerating people *prior* to Pentecost, so will He *after* the [Rapture](#).

From this chapter (Rev. 7<sup>+</sup>) it should be evident that the Holy Spirit will be still at work in the Tribulation, for the work of regeneration is His particular ministry. While the work of restraining evil is removed, allowing the Antichrist to begin his evil rise to power, the Holy Spirit Himself will still be in the world and will have an active ministry. While He will no longer be baptizing (for that is a special ministry for the Church only), He will be performing some of His other ministries, such as regeneration, filling, sealing, etc. In all this, the second purpose of the Tribulation will be accomplished: that of bringing about a worldwide revival.<sup>35</sup>

For further discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit during the Tribulation, see [BORROW Pentecost, [Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology](#), 263-274, [265](#), [267](#), [268](#), [270](#), [272](#), [274](#)].

#### 4.14.5 - Is all Tribulation the Same?

Critics of a [pretribulation rapture](#) point to many verses which indicate that Christians will undergo tribulation—as is also demonstrated by experience (Mat. 13:21; Mark 4:17; John 16:33; Rom. 5:3; 8:35; 2Cor. 1:4; 7:4; Rev. 1:9<sup>+</sup>). They rightly argue that tribulation refines the saints and develops their character. They conclude that the Church must go through the time of God's wrath in order to prove and refine the saints of the end time. However, Revelation 3:10<sup>+</sup> contradicts this view because it indicates that the purpose of the Tribulation is to test the [earth dwellers](#), not the Church. Also, there is an important difference between general tribulation which is the result of Satan and a sinful world (Mat. 24:21, 29; Mark 13:19; Rev. 7:14<sup>+</sup>) and tribulation which is the result of the outpouring of God's wrath on an unbelieving world (Ps. 2:12; Isa. 13:9, 13; 63:3; Jer. 10:10; Rev. 6:16-17<sup>+</sup>; 11:18<sup>+</sup>; 14:8-10<sup>+</sup>; 19<sup>+</sup>; 15:1<sup>+</sup>, 7<sup>+</sup>; 16:17<sup>+</sup>, 19<sup>+</sup>; 19:15<sup>+</sup>). It is the Lamb Himself who opens the seven seals which lead to the events of the seven trumpets and seven bowls (Rev. 6:1<sup>+</sup>). It is the [bridegroom](#) who initiates the events which trigger the Tribulation of the end! Will the bridegroom pour out *His wrath* upon His own bride? Scripture says no!<sup>36</sup> (See [Church Betrothed to Christ](#)) The Church will be kept from the “hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (Rev. 3:10<sup>+</sup>). The Church is kept not from the *trial*, but from the very *hour* of trial (see commentary on [Revelation 3:10](#)). Many additional verses indicate that the Church is not appointed to endure *God's wrath*, that it will be exempted from this *time period* (Luke 21:36; Rom. 5:9; 1Th. 1:10; 5:9). Although some saints in history have been kept *through* times of tribulation (e.g., Noah's family in the Ark, Israel at the Passover), others were kept *from* God's judgment (e.g., Enoch prior to Noah's flood, Lot and his daughters in Sodom). In the case of the Church, as Christ's bride she is not appointed to wrath, but like Enoch will “walk with God” for God will “take her” (cf. Gen. 5:24).

#### 4.14.6 - Delivered from the Wrath to Come

Some have understood Paul's teaching concerning the delivery of believers from the “wrath to come” (1Th. 1:10) as describing their exemption from the wrath of judgment which unbelievers will undergo for rejecting Christ (John 3:18-19, 36). But everywhere in Scripture, the benefits of redemption are fully and immediately applied at the time of redemption. Believers *have* eternal life (John 3:15; Acts 13:48; 1Jn. 5:13). The *wrath to come* does not speak of the potential judgment of believers which has already been averted by their saving faith, but the “hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (Rev. 3:10<sup>+</sup>).

Much more than, **having now been justified** by His blood, we **shall be saved** from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Rom. 5:9-10) [emphasis added]

The justification is *present tense* and entirely complete. The believer stands totally and completely justified the moment he comes to faith. The wrath here is *future*.

The wrath of God here [1Th. 1:10] is future, and hence, cannot refer to the general wrath of God against sin which is a present

reality. This wrath is future. While Hell and the Lake of Fire are also future, they cannot be what this passage is referring to. By virtue of salvation, the believer is already redeemed from Hell. . . . the wrath that the Church is being delivered from is the wrath of the Great Tribulation. He is coming for the specific purpose of delivering the Church from the wrath to come, namely, the Tribulation period.<sup>37</sup>

The salvation spoken of here [1Th. 5:9] is future, and so cannot be soteriological, which is a present reality. The salvation here is eschatological, referring to the redemption of the body which will occur at the Rapture. It is this salvation that the Church has been appointed to and not to the wrath of the Day of the Lord.<sup>38</sup>

4.14.7 - The Church and the book of Revelation

Some note that although the term “church” ([ἐκκλησία](#) [ekklēsia]) is not found in chapters 6-18 of the book of Revelation, “saints” ([ἁγίων](#) [hagiōn], Rev. 13:7+) are frequently the subject of the events of the Tribulation period. Yet this does not prove that the *Church* is present at that time because *saints* is a generic term which describes believers of all ages. And as we have already discussed, saints of the present Church age enjoy a unique relationship by virtue of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost which differentiates them from saints of other ages, including the Tribulation period.

The fact that saints are found in the Tribulation does not prove that the Church is there any more than the existence of saints in the Old Testament proves that the Church was there. It has already been shown that the Church began at Pentecost with the baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Old Testament saints are not part of the Church. In the same way, the existence of saints in the Tribulation does not prove that the Church is there either, and not even once are they called the Church. The Church, as such, is never mentioned in any passage dealing with the Tribulation. . . . in chapters 6-18 [of the book of Revelation], which deal with the Tribulation period itself, the Church is not even mentioned once. This is most unusual in light of the prominence of the Church in the chapters dealing with events prior to and after the Tribulation. . . . This is only an argument from silence, but within the structure of the book of Revelation it is a powerful case indeed. From the viewpoint of pure exposition, it is impossible for anyone to turn to a Tribulation passage and to show that the Church is there.<sup>39</sup>

4.14.8 - The Timing of the Rapture

Although there are a variety of views as to *when* the Church is caught away to be with Christ, we believe the Scriptures indicate a catching away of the saints *prior* to the Tribulation or [70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel](#) (Dan. 9:24-27).

There are expositors who argue that Revelation supports a pretribulational rapture of the church. They cite the following arguments: (1) the promise of exemption from tribulation that was given to the church of Philadelphia (Rev. 3:10+); (2) John’s spiritual translation to heaven as [a typological] indication of the Rapture (Rev. 4:1-2+); (3) the presence of the twenty-four elders in heaven which indicates that the church is removed during the Tribulation (Rev. 4:4+ff); (4) the absence of any reference to the church in Revelation 4+-18+; (5) the marriage supper of the Lamb coming down with Christ at His Second Coming (Rev. 19:7-9+); (6) The complete absence of any statement of rapture in the closing days of the Tribulation.<sup>40</sup>

Additional reasons for a [pretribulational rapture](#) include: (7) the Jewish focus of Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week in light of the distinctions made between the Church and Israel (Rom. 11:25-26);<sup>41</sup> (8) the [imminent](#) coming of Christ for His Church precludes prophetic views<sup>42</sup> which hold that events such as the revealing of [Antichrist](#) or the signing of the seven-year covenant take place *before* the Rapture (Dan. 9:27; 2Th. 2:1-4); (9) the Church is everywhere instructed to watch for *Christ* but never *Antichrist* (Tit. 2:13);<sup>43</sup> (10) believing sheep (which would have been caught up in a [posttribulation](#) rapture) are found upon the earth at Christ’s coming (Mat. 25:31).

4.14.9 - Typology and the Rapture

It is a well-established fact that Scripture contains typology—passages which do not explicitly teach doctrine, but which provide “hints” concerning aspects of God’s plans and actions. For example, Christ points to the incident where Moses raises a serpent on a pole (Num. 21:9) as a type (*demonstration or model*) of His crucifixion (John 3:14-16). Although the doctrine of the crucifixion cannot be taught from the passage in Numbers, *by God’s design* the correlation between the incident of the serpent on a pole and the crucifixion is meant to be instructive and worthy of study:

Example of Biblical Typology: Moses and the Serpent on a Pole (Num. 21)

Type (Model)	Antitype (Fulfillment)
The Israelites were bitten by serpents resulting in death (Num. 21:6).	Adam and Eve, and by extension all of mankind, were “bitten by Satan” resulting in the curse of death (Gen. 3:1, 19).

Moses lifted up the serpent on a <i>pole</i> (Num. 21:9).	Jesus was lifted up on a <i>tree</i> (Acts 5:30).
Moses placed a <i>serpent</i> on the pole (Num. 21:9).	Jesus was nailed to the cross. God made Him who knew no sin <i>to be sin</i> for us (Isa. 53:6, 10; 2Cor. 5:21).
Merely <i>looking on</i> the serpent on the pole provided life (Num. 21:9). <sup>44</sup>	Merely <i>trusting in</i> Jesus on the cross provides life (Isa. 45:22; John 3:16; Rev. 2:7 <sup>+</sup> ).
The serpent was <i>cursed</i> (Gen. 3:14).	Christ was made a <i>curse</i> for us (Gal. 3:13).
The serpent deceived man using a tree (Gen. 3:6; Num. 21:9).	Christ <i>redeemed</i> man using a tree (Acts 10:39).
The serpent, representing sin, was brazen—a metal not consumed by fire, representing judgment (Num. 21:9).	Those who trust in Christ are sinners, but their sin is judged while they themselves are not consumed.

These are a few examples of the extent to which typology can reveal subtle aspects concerning a related event. Here, the serpent on a pole incident sets forth numerous aspects of the crucifixion of Christ hundreds of years in advance. We could make a similar study of [Abraham's offering of Isaac](#) which models, in advance, the offering of another Son by another Father on the very same mountain (Gen. 22). Or we could point to the book of Ruth and the way in which Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi model Jesus, the Church, and Israel.<sup>45</sup> Our point here is to establish the fact that God has embedded within the events of Scripture small “gems” of additional insight into future events for those with eyes to see them. These typological hints cannot be used to teach doctrine, but neither should they be ignored. The student of God's Word who ignores them is overlooking a mine of riches. In the case of the [Rapture](#) and God's judgment, we have several typological examples we might note:

1. Noah's flood: Enoch was raptured *prior to* the flood. (Noah and his family were *preserved through* the flood.)
2. Sodom and Gomorrah: Lot and his daughters were rescued prior to judgment. The angels could not destroy Sodom until Lot had been removed (Gen. 19:22).
3. After the seven letters to the [seven churches](#) of chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation, John hears a voice like a trumpet calling him up to heaven (Rev. 4:1<sup>+</sup> cf. 1Th. 4:16). Thereafter, the Church appears in heaven.
4. The overcomer at the church of Thyatira is promised “the morning star” (Rev. 2:28<sup>+</sup>). The morning star is Christ (Rev. 22:16<sup>+</sup>). The morning star rises near the end of the long night, *before the night has run its course* and before the dawn. The night is the current age. The day is the millennial reign of Christ. The morning star will appear to those who watch for Him before the night concludes (Heb. 9:28).

These examples vary from somewhat simple and compelling (the rapture of Enoch prior to the flood) to complex and tenuous (the morning star) and are by no means exhaustive. On their own, they are mere hints or possibilities. But when combined with the other factors listed above, they reinforce the teaching that a category of believers—those who “walk with Him,” His own *Body of Christ*—will be taken up before He pours forth His wrath in judgment upon “those who dwell upon the earth.”

Postributionalists reject this conclusion, contending there is no reason why Christians in the last generation deserve to escape the great tribulation. The fact is, however, that Christians in every other generation have escaped the great tribulation, so there is no reason why the last should be singled out for participation in it.<sup>46</sup>

#### 4.14.10 - Additional Resources on the Rapture

For those who wish to study the issues surrounding the [Rapture](#) in greater detail, we suggest the following resources:

- Ice, Thomas and Timothy Demy. *The Return*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999.<sup>47</sup>
- Ice, Thomas and Timothy Demy. *When The Trumpet Sounds*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995.<sup>48</sup>
- LaHaye, Tim. *The Rapture*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2002.<sup>49</sup>
- Pentecost, J. Dwight. BORROW Pentecost, [Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958.<sup>50</sup>
- Ryrie, Charles C. *Come Quickly, Lord Jesus*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996.<sup>51</sup>
- Showers, Renald E. *Maranatha, Our Lord Come*. Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1995.<sup>52</sup>
- Stanton, Gerald B. *Kept From The Hour*, 4th ed. Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle Publishing Co., Inc., 1991.<sup>53</sup>



- Walvoord, John F. *The Rapture Question*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979.<sup>54</sup>

Resources which discuss the pre-wrath rapture position include:

- Fruchtenbaum, Arnold G. *A Review of the Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, n.d.
- McClean, John A. "Another Look at Rosenthal's 'Pre-Wrath Rapture.'" *Bibliotheca Sacra*<sup>55</sup>
- Rosenthal, Marvin. *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990.
- Showers, Renald E. *The Pre-Wrath Rapture View*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2001.
- Stanton, Gerald B. "A Review of the Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church." *Bibliotheca Sacra*<sup>56</sup>

We do not advocate the pre-wrath rapture position because we believe it suffers from numerous problems—including the denial of an [imminent](#) return of Christ for His Church.

For those of us who may be bedazzled or dazed by the current blizzard of alternate theories, positions, and prophetic perspectives blowing our way, there is a simple test we can use to check for truth. It involves one word: *Imminence*. What does the purveyor of a new, novel, or absurd approach to end-times events have to say about the imminent return of Christ, which the Scriptures declare to be the watchword of the church? Any proposition that ignores, delays, or mutilates the clear meaning of the word and the way in which the early church understood *imminence*—the any-moment return of Christ—should be immediately discredited.<sup>57</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Renald E. Showers, [Maranatha, Our Lord Come](#) (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1995), 245.

<sup>2</sup>Tim LaHaye and Thomas Ice, [Charting the End Times](#) (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2001), 108.

<sup>3</sup>Donald Grey Barnhouse, [Revelation](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 77.

<sup>4</sup>E. W. Bullinger, [Commentary On Revelation](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1984, 1935), 194.

<sup>5</sup>Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, [A General Introduction to the Bible](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1986), 26.

<sup>6</sup>Frederick William Danker and Walter Bauer, [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 109.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>LaHaye, [Charting the End Times](#), 110.

<sup>9</sup>Showers, [Maranatha, Our Lord Come](#), 11.

<sup>10</sup>We use the term in its traditional sense: to denote his *physical* coming yet future.

<sup>11</sup>Thomas Ice and Timothy J. Demy, [The Return](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999), 101-102.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> [Ibid.] [J. Dwight Pentecost, BORROW Pentecost, [Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology](#), (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), 207]

<sup>19</sup>Ice, [The Return](#), 101-102.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>A critical problem for the posttribulational rapture view is its inability to explain the Sheep and Goat Judgment of Matthew 25:31-46. If all believers are caught up during the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the Tribulation, then only unbelievers are left upon the earth. Yet when Jesus gathers the nations upon His arrival and kingdom (Mat. 25:31) *sheep* are found in their midst. These sheep demonstrate their faith by their works and enter the Millennial Kingdom. When did they come to faith if all the faithful were caught up to meet Him at His return? The solution is found in recognizing the sheep as saints which came to faith *after the Rapture of the Church* and survive the Tribulation to populate the Millennial Kingdom. See [Who Populates the Millennial Kingdom?](#)

<sup>22</sup>Richard L. Mayhue, "[Why a Pretribulational Rapture.](#)" in Richard L. Mayhue, ed., [The Master's Seminary Journal](#), vol. 13 no. 1 (Sun Valley, CA: The Master's Seminary, Spring 2002), 247.

<sup>23</sup>[Ibid.](#)

<sup>24</sup>[Ibid.](#)

<sup>25</sup>LaHaye, [Charting the End Times](#), 112.

<sup>26</sup>[Ibid.](#)

<sup>27</sup>See our discussion why [Nero](#) cannot be the man of sin.

<sup>28</sup>Charles E. Powell, "[The Identity of the 'Restrainer' in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7.](#)" in [Bibliotheca Sacra](#), vol. 154 no. 615 (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, July-Sep 1997), 328-329.

<sup>29</sup>[Ibid.](#), 330.

<sup>30</sup>Barnhouse, [Revelation](#), 120-121.

<sup>31</sup>Powell, [The Identity of the "Restrainer" in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7](#), 330.

<sup>32</sup>Thomas L. Constable, "[2 Thessalonians.](#)" in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., [The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#) (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1983), 2Th. 2:7.

<sup>33</sup>John MacArthur, ed., [The MacArthur Study Bible](#) (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1997), 2Th. 2:6.

<sup>34</sup>Powell, [The Identity of the "Restrainer" in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7](#), 331.

<sup>35</sup>Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, [The Footsteps of Messiah](#), rev ed (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 224.

<sup>36</sup>It is not a light thing to maintain that the Church goes through the Tribulation for it casts a large shadow over the character of her bridegroom!

<sup>37</sup>Fruchtenbaum, [The Footsteps of Messiah](#), 153.

<sup>38</sup>[Ibid.](#), 154.

<sup>39</sup>[Ibid.](#), 151.

<sup>40</sup>John A. McLean, "[Structure of the Book of Revelation.](#)" in Mal Couch, ed., [Dictionary of Premillennial Theology](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1996), 372-373.

<sup>41</sup>"God does not intend the church to be present on the earth for any part of the 70 weeks or 490 years that He has determined specifically for Israel and Jerusalem [Dan. 9:24-27]. He intends to keep His 70-weeks program for Israel and Jerusalem and His program for the church separate and distinct from each other, just as Israel and the church are distinct entities."—Showers, [Maranatha, Our Lord Come](#), 246.

<sup>42</sup>Such as the pre-wrath rapture view.

<sup>43</sup>"Such passages as 1 Thessalonians 5:6; Titus 2:13; Revelation 3:3+ all warn the believer to be watching for the Lord Himself, not for signs that would precede His coming. . . . the object of the believer's attention is always directed to Christ, never to these portents."—Pentecost, BORROW Pentecost, [Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology](#), 203.

<sup>44</sup>Looking on the serpent was an act demonstrating faith.

<sup>45</sup>Did the saints of Moses' and Abraham's day understand the details of these types? Perhaps some—like Moses and Abraham—did, but the majority probably did not. Yet it is clear that those who maintained a close relationship with God and carefully studied His Word often understand subtleties which others were unaware of (Luke 2:25-38).

<sup>46</sup>Henry Morris, [\*The Revelation Record\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1983), Rev. 3:10.

<sup>47</sup>Ice, [\*The Return\*](#).

<sup>48</sup>Thomas Ice and Timothy J. Demy, [\*When the Trumpet Sounds\*](#) (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995).

<sup>49</sup>Tim LaHaye, [\*The Rapture\*](#) (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2002).

<sup>50</sup>Pentecost, BORROW [\*Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology\*](#).

<sup>51</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, [\*Come Quickly, Lord Jesus\*](#) (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996).

<sup>52</sup>Showers, [\*Maranatha, Our Lord Come\*](#).

<sup>53</sup>Gerald B. Stanton, [\*Kept from the Hour\*](#), 4th ed (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle Publishing, Co., Inc., 1991).

<sup>54</sup>John F. Walvoord, [\*The Rapture Question\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979).

<sup>55</sup>John A. McClean, "[Another Look at Rosenthal's 'Pre-Wrath Rapture'.](#)" in [\*Bibliotheca Sacra\*](#), vol. 148 no. 592 (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, Oct-Dec 1991).

<sup>56</sup>Gerald B. Stanton, "[A Review of the Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church.](#)" in [\*Bibliotheca Sacra\*](#), vol. 148 no. 589 (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, Jan-Mar 1991).

<sup>57</sup>Elwood McQuaid, "[Expecting a Call Any Moment.](#)" in Elwood McQuaid, ed., [\*Israel My Glory\*](#) (Westville, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, January/February 2005), 10.

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