

# Valley Bible Church – Adult Class

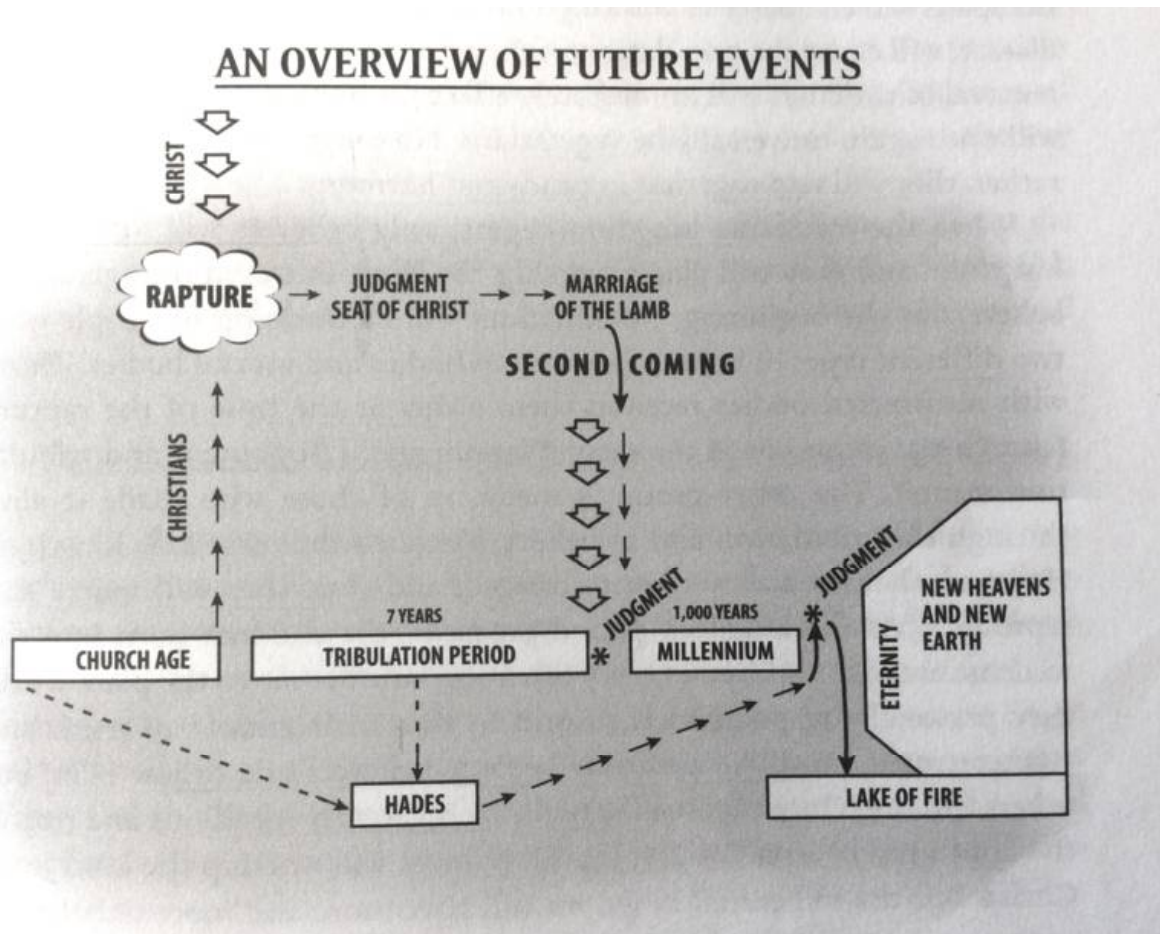
## Living in Light of His Return: The Rapture of the Church, Revisited Adult SS ~ June 14, 2015

### Introduction:

Today, we revisit our study of the rapture of the church, the first dramatic event in the end times chronology. Two weeks ago was an "Introduction to Eschatology," last week was the beginning of "The Rapture of the Church," and today we will be aiming to complete our study of the rapture.

### Review:

Review Paul A. Benware's chart (in *Understanding End Times Prophecy*) from last week...



For our study this morning, we will examine four elements in regards to the rapture, so that we might live in light of Christ's return. Last week we lightly covered a definition of the rapture, participants in the rapture, results of the rapture, and the timing of the rapture.

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## Outline:

### 1. Rapture Passages

#### a. John 14:3

- i. This passage is the first mention of the Rapture in Scripture.
- ii. The words of Christ are spoken in the upper room on Passover the night of His betrayal, arrest, and trial. He would be departing soon, but He wanted His disciples' hearts to not be troubled (**14:1**). He told them to trust Him that He is going to prepare a place for them in heaven and that He will return soon to take them with Him.
- iii. The custom in ancient Israel of which Jesus was speaking ("In my Father's house are many rooms") was that of the bridegroom who returns to his father's house to build an additional room for he and his soon-to-be bride. Upon hearing this, the disciples would have taken Jesus to be absolutely serious and committed to return to them for good.
- iv. The "many rooms" in His "Father's house" (**14:2**) are referring to the New Jerusalem of **Revelation 21**, the eternal dwelling place of God with man.
- v. The words "I will come again" (**Jn 14:3**) confirm the certainty of the return of Christ.
- vi. The words "and will take you to myself" (**14:3**) describe this return of Christ to be one of a *removal* of the believers from the earth to join with Him in His Father's house in heaven.
- vii. If by this removal Jesus were speaking of His Second Coming (**Rev 19:11–21; Matt 25:31; Zech 14:1–5**), then He would be coming to the earth, not taking the believers to heaven. This passage seems to describe a different event than the Second Coming.

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- viii. This text parallels much of what Paul said in **1 Thessalonians 4:13–18**. See in the chart below.

<i>Similar Characteristics Between Two Key Rapture Passages</i>		
	<b>John 14</b>	<b>1 Thessalonians 4</b>
Comfort and Encouragement	"Let not your hearts be troubled" (v. 1)	"that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope" (v. 13) "encourage one another with these words" (v. 18)
Removal and Reunion	"take you to myself" (v. 3)	"will be caught up together with them...to meet the Lord" (v. 17)
Meeting Place	"my Father's house" (v. 2)	"in the clouds"... "in the air" (v. 17)
Requirement for Access	"No one comes to the Father except through me" (v. 6)	"through Jesus" (v. 14) "in Christ" (v. 16)
Attitude of Faith	"Believe in God; believe also in me" (v. 1)	"we believe that Jesus died and rose again" (v. 14)

## b. First Thessalonians 4:17

- i. This passage is known as the central passage of Scripture in support of the rapture of all those who are in Christ. It contains the most information about this event than any other passage. It is also the passage from which we get the word "rapture."
- ii. The Thessalonian church had been operating with wrong information about the future hope of "those who are asleep," which is a figure of speech for those believers who have died (**4:13**). Believers' physical bodies will one day "wake up" out of death. *Why is this figure of speech so appropriate? Why do you think this verb is used of the death of believers but never of the death of Christ?*
- iii. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the basis for the believer's resurrection hope (**4:14**). Because He lives, we shall live (**Rom 6:4, 5, 8**).
- iv. God the Father, through Jesus, is the One who rises up those who have fallen asleep (**4:14**). "God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power" (**1 Cor 6:14; cf. 2 Cor 4:14**).
- v. Those church age believers who are alive when the Lord comes back will not go to meet Him before those church age believers who have fallen asleep (**4:15**). The deceased saints will not be forgotten; their bodies will rise immediately before those raptured (**4:16**). None of

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those who had fallen asleep in Christ would suffer any disadvantage in the end when Jesus returns.

- vi. The “coming of the Lord” (**4:15**) has been addressed by Paul earlier in this letter:
  1. **1 Thessalonians 1:10** “and to *wait for his Son from heaven*, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from *the wrath to come*.”
  2. **1 Thessalonians 2:19** “For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus *at his coming*? Is it not you?”
- vii. The Lord, who had ascended into the heavens on the clouds (**Acts 1:9**) to the right hand of the throne of God the Father in heaven (**Acts 7:55, 56; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3**), will descend from heaven in the same way the disciples saw Him go into heaven (**Acts 1:11**).
- viii. Note: in verse 16 it is “the Lord himself” who “will descend” for His own. This indicates a distinction between the rapture and the Second Coming, at which point He “will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call” to “gather his elect” (**Matt 24:31**). In **Matthew 24:31**, Jesus is speaking of a gathering of the elect from all the heavens and all the earth so that He might bring them into His kingdom after the tribulation is over.
- ix. Three distinct and cosmic sounds will be heard at His coming: the Lord’s cry of command (military term of authority), the voice of an archangel (possibly Michael’s), and the sound of the trumpet of God (**4:16**). These sequential sounds are issued from heaven, forceful, and dramatic, heralding Christ’s return for His saints.
- x. Immediately following the resurrection of the saints who have fallen asleep is the “snatching up” of all the living saints (**4:17**). The term is a violent one sometimes used positively where the object raptured is benefited (ie. Paul being snatched up by Roman soldiers from rioters in Jerusalem in **Acts 23:10**, the male child being caught up to God from the great red dragon in **Revelation 12:5**, the Spirit’s snatching away of Philip after his discussion with the Ethiopian in **Acts 8:39**, and Paul’s being caught up into the third heaven in **2 Corinthians 12:2, 3**). All the church, since as early as **Acts 2**, will be reunited in the clouds to meet the Lord when he returns.

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- xi. Note: The Apostle Paul says in verse 17, “we who are alive,” including himself. This indicates that he believed the Lord might return in his lifetime. This speaks to the imminent nature of His return; it is hanging over us. He will return at any moment (**Jam 5:7–9**)!
- xii. The logical and practical outworking of these truths is comfort and encouragement. This is worth meditating on in order to consider how we might live in light of His return...

## c. First Corinthians 15:51–53

- i. The broad context of this passage focuses on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead as the foundation of our faith. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, then we are most to be pitied of all people (**15:19**).
- ii. Similar to **1 Thessalonians 4**, Paul mentions that those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished if Christ had not been raised (**15:18**).
- iii. Christ is the first to experience the power of the resurrection, then at His coming those who belong to Him (**15:23**).
- iv. Paul had been talking about those who have fallen asleep in Christ and what will happen to their bodies at the resurrection of all saints (perishable to imperishable, a natural body to a spiritual body, earthly bodies to heavenly bodies, dishonor to glory, weakness to power, man of dust to man of heaven). In verse 50, Paul addresses the curious question of what will happen to those who are *not* dead at Christ’s coming.
- v. The “mystery” of verse 51 is the New Testament revelation that believers who have not fallen asleep will “all be changed,” meaning they will receive a heavenly, imperishable, spiritual body without first dying when the Lord returns. This rapture reality was not something taught in the Old Testament. *Why do we need new bodies?*
- vi. Both for the resurrected and the raptured, this change happens “in a moment, in the blinking of an eye.”
- vii. The trumpet of God will sound, signaling the dead to rise and the living to be changed. This “last trumpet” is the triumphant announcement of the end of the church age. When God prepares

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Israel to receive her Messiah during the Tribulation period, there will be more trumpets.

- viii. There is no detailed explanation of what our heavenly bodies will be like here in this text. *What hints do we have from other passages of Scripture though?*
- ix. We will go to be with the Lord either through dying or being raptured. Either way, we receive bodies that are fit for heaven to behold the glory of God.
- x. John MacArthur, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, says, “During the Civil War a group of soldiers had to spend a winter night without tents in an open field. During the night it snowed several inches, and at dawn the chaplain reported a strange sight. The snow-covered soldiers looked like the mounds of new graves, and when the bugle sounded reveille a man immediately rose from each mound of snow, dramatically reminding the chaplain of this passage from 1 Corinthians” (p. 444).

## d. And others a couple others...

- i. **Philippians 3:20** “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, **21** who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”
- ii. **Titus 2:13** “waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”
- iii. **James 5:7** “Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. **8** You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. **9** Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.”

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## 2. Rapture Protocol

Proper methodology for addressing the rapture issue (three tips from Dr. Michael Vlach):

- a. ***Examine the Rapture and Second Coming passages.*** Go first to the portions of Scripture that speak directly about the Rapture and the return of the Lord to earth. Study John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58; and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 for the Rapture. Also examine Zechariah 14:1-21; Matthew 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-27; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; and Revelation 19:11-21 for the Second Coming to earth.

### Second Coming Passages

- **Zechariah 14:1–9**
- **Matthew 24:29** “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **30** Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. **31** 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.”
- **Luke 21:25** “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, **26** people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **27** And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. **28** Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”
- **1 Thessalonians 3:13** “so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”
- **Revelation 19:11–21**

- b. ***Examine implications of conclusions.*** Proper methodology does not stop with an examination of the primary texts addressing an issue. As John Feinberg says, “While one should begin with passages that speak directly about the doctrine under consideration, one must also pay attention to the implications of the doctrine. This is especially important if, as in the case of the rapture, the passages about the rapture and return of the Lord do not determine the question of the rapture’s timing in relation to the time of the Tribulation. . . . Implications and relations of doctrines to one another are crucial. If one’s position on a given

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theological issue is correct, it will fit with other known theological and biblical truths rather than contradict them. (John S. Feinberg, "Arguing for the Rapture: Who Must Prove What and How" in, *When the Trumpet Sounds*, Thomas Ice and Timothy eds. p. 191)

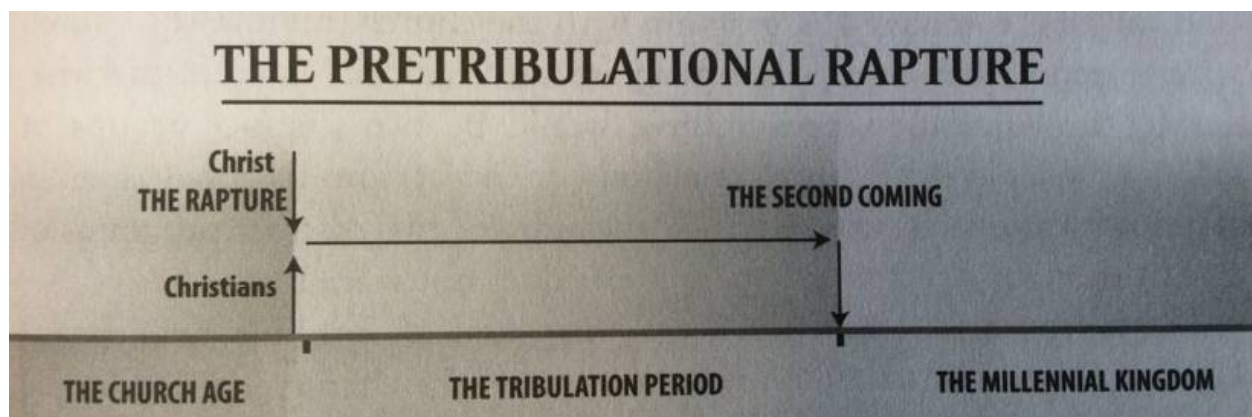
- c. ***Putting it all together.*** "The key point to remember is that proper theological methodology dare not allow us to ignore either the rapture and *parousia* [Second Coming] passages or the doctrines that have implications for one's views on the rapture and second advent. Although study should begin with passages that speak directly to the topic at hand, both are equally important. It is surely no victory to uphold one's views on the timing of the rapture at the expense of denying what God's Word says, for example, about the relation of the church to God's judgmental wrath" (John Feinberg, p. 192).

## 3. Rapture Positions

Explanations are taken from VBC Position Paper on "The Rapture of the Church." Charts are taken from *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, by Paul A. Benware.

### a. Pretribulational View ("Pre-trib")

This view teaches that the removal of the entire church (both the dead and living saints) will occur before any part of the seven-year tribulation period, that is before the beginning of the seventieth week of Daniel 9:24-27. It is necessary to say "before the seven year tribulation period" because some who hold to a midtribulation rapture state that the rapture is pretribulational, understanding the tribulation to refer only to the last three and one-half years of the seven-year period.

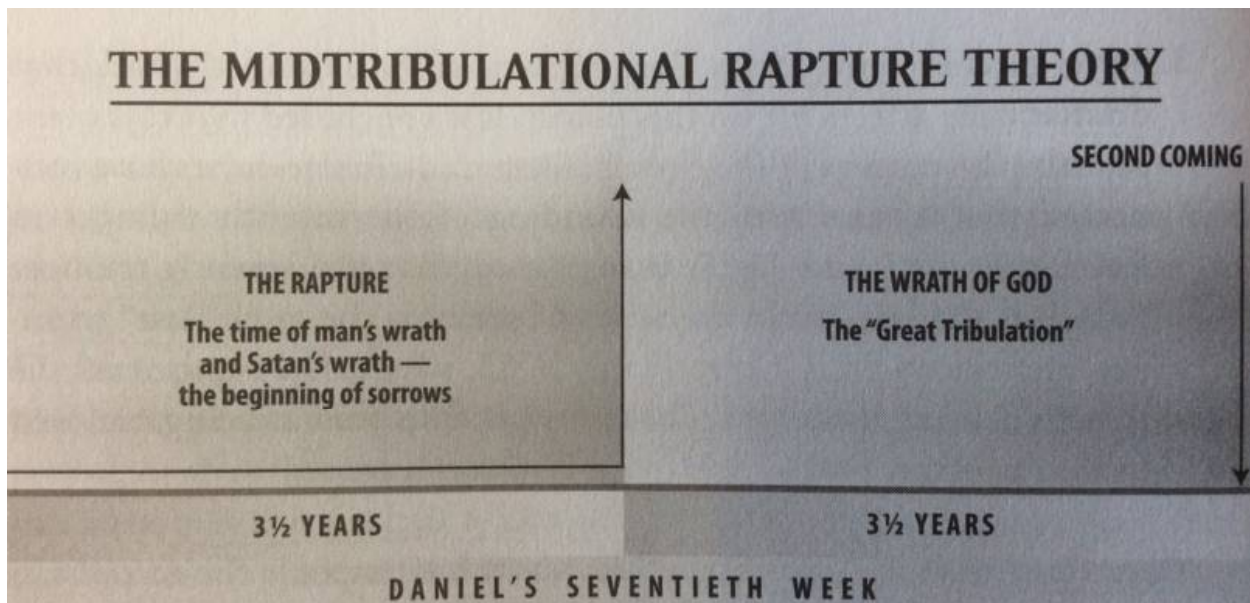




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## b. Midtribulational View (“Mid-trib”)

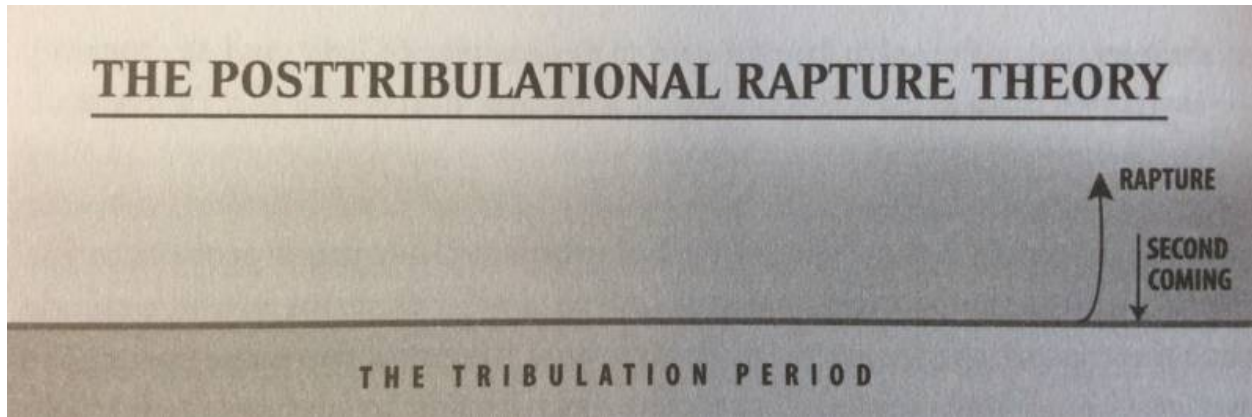
This view teaches that the rapture of the church will occur at the midpoint of the seven years of tribulation, after the first three and one-half years. In this view, only the last half of Daniel’s seventieth week is considered to be the tribulation period. The church will endure the first three and one-half years known as the wrath of men, but will escape the outpouring of God’s wrath during the final three and one-half years. The rapture of the church is said to occur in connection with the sounding of the seventh trumpet judgment and the catching up of the two witnesses in Revelation 11.



## c. Posttribulational View (“Post-trib”)

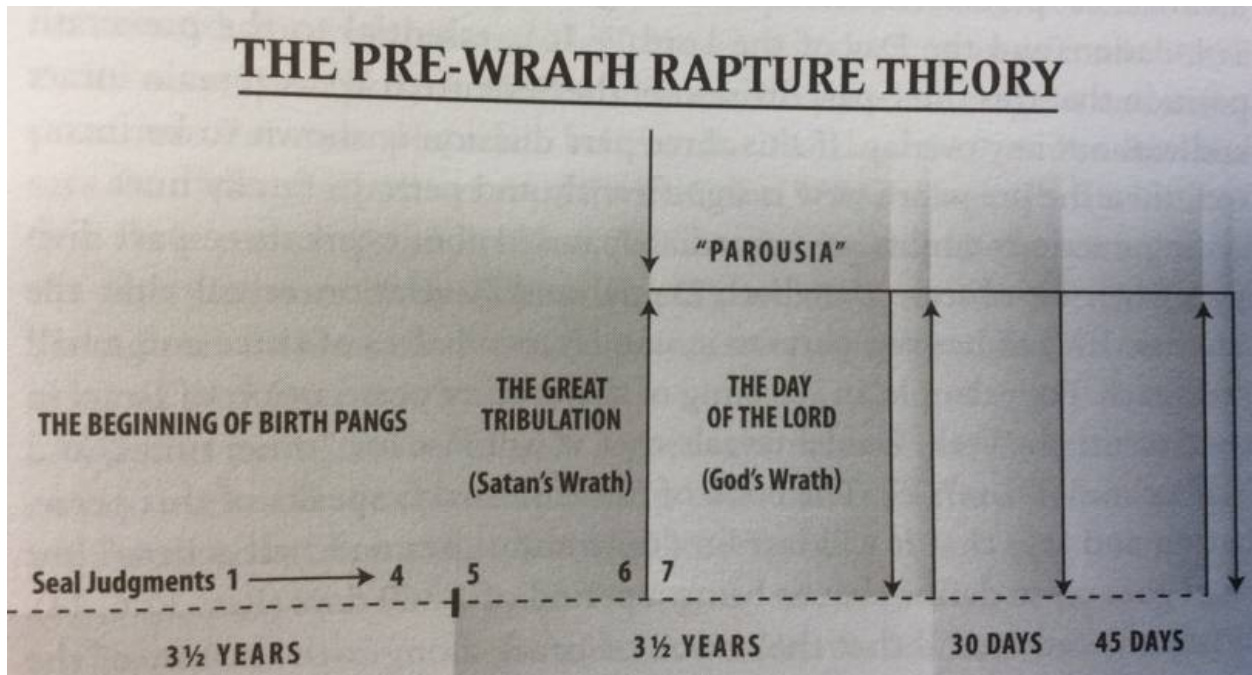
This view teaches that the rapture of the church and the second coming of Christ are facets of a single event, which will occur at the end of the tribulation period when Christ returns. The church will be on earth during the tribulation to experience the judgment of God. There are four different types of posttribulationalism that emerge out of differing arguments and approaches. In fact, there is such diversity among them that they actually contradict one another. They are: Classic Posttrib, Semi-classic Posttrib, Futurist Posttrib, and Dispensational Posttrib. Discussion will be limited here.

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## d. Pre-wrath Rapture View

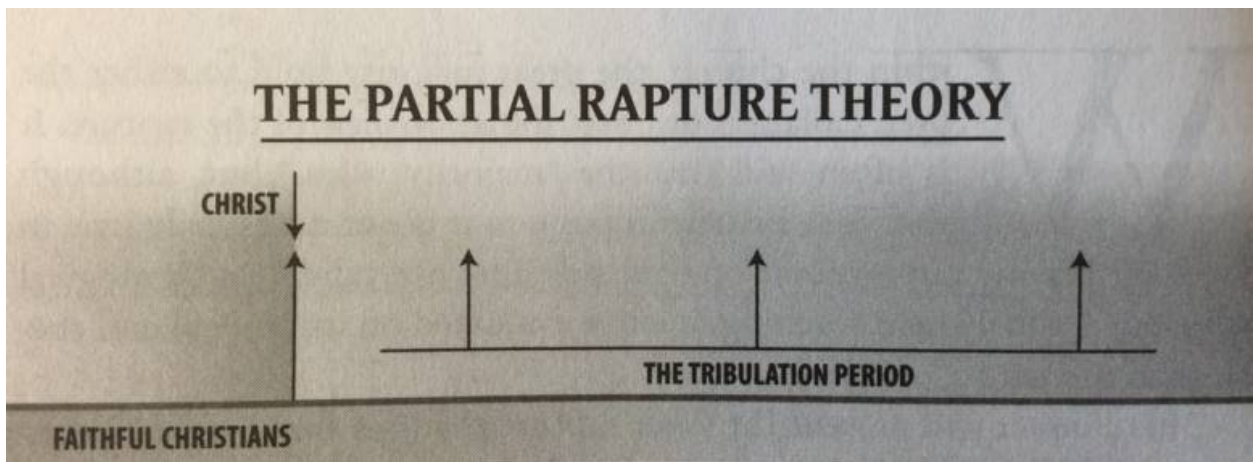
This view teaches that the rapture will occur sometime after the midpoint of the seven year tribulation but before the second coming. It serves as a variation of the mid-tribulation view with many similarities to posttribulationism. It divides the tribulation period into three distinct periods: 1) The Beginning of Sorrows; 2) The Great Tribulation and 3) The Day of the Lord. The church endures the first two periods, but will be removed prior to the third period, viewed as God's wrath.



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## e. Partial Rapture View

This view teaches that only those who are faithful and spiritual will be raptured prior to the tribulation. Those who are prepared for the Lord's return and are found waiting and watching, will escape the terrors of the tribulation by being taken in the future rapture. Those who are not taken and enter into the tribulation period because of their worldliness and carnality will be raptured progressively during the tribulation period as they become more faithful and spiritual, while still others will entirely miss the rapture. The tribulation is seen as a time of purging these believers from their sin and carnality.



## 4. Rapture Preference

These different views place the rapture in varying relationships to the tribulation period, which we will be covering in two weeks. To be honest, no rapture view is without some difficulties, but the pretribulational rapture is clearly the strongest and most consistent with a literal understanding of the Scriptures.

The following are strong, biblical arguments for a pretribulational rapture view:

### a. **The Rapture of the Church Precedes the Redemption of Israel**

- i. One must maintain a clear distinction between what passages, events, prophecies are relating to Israel, to the church, or to both. The clearer you make the distinction, where Scripture does, the more you will notice these "two programs of God" with two distinct groups in the end times.
- ii. The church did NOT take over, replace, or fulfill the covenant promises that God made with Israel in the Old Testament. These covenants (Abrahamic, Davidic, New) will all find their final fulfillment in the Millennial Kingdom, where not only a future,

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believing generation of Israel inhabits the earth but also the redeemed from all time (including Gentiles!).

- iii. The Tribulation is a period of preparation during which God gets Israel ready for the Messiah's Second Coming. God will complete His program with the church, rapture us into the heavens, and then He will resume His program with national Israel on the earth. Once a future generation of Israel is saved, the distinction between Israel and the church becomes minimized.
- iv. **Romans 11:25** "Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. **26** And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob; **27** and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."
- v. The book of Revelation leaves room for the two programs of God.

## b. **The Rapture of the Church is Imminent Involving No Signs**

- i. The rapture is imminent, meaning "about to happen; at hand; hanging over."
- ii. "An imminent event is one that is always hanging overhead, is constantly ready to befall or overtake a person, is always close at hand in the sense that it could happen at any moment. Other things *may* happen before the imminent event, but nothing else *must* take place before it happens. If something else must take place before an event can happen, that event is not imminent." (Renald Showers, *Maranatha*, 127)
- iii. So if the rapture and the Second Coming are two facets of the same event (postrib view), then there would be several signs and precursors to observe:
  - 1. Wars, rumors of wars, nation against nation, famines, earthquakes...these are the beginning of birth pains;
  - 2. Christian executions, false prophets, the antichrist will break his peace treaty with Israel, the antichrist will require Israel and all nations to worship him;
  - 3. Moonlight will fail, stars will fall from heaven, the Son of Man appearing in the sky in power;
  - 4. All the prophetic signs of Revelation 6–18); etc.

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- iv. And because of the rapture's imminence, may we patiently await our Savior's return:

**James 5:7** "Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. **8** You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. **9** Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door."

## c. The Rapture of the Church is Different than the Second Coming

- i. One of the biggest differences between the rapture and the Second Coming is that the Second Coming—after the 7 years of tribulation—has many signs of His coming to earth to set up His kingdom. Other distinctions include:
  1. At the Rapture, believers meet the Lord in the air (**1 Thess 4:17**); at the Second Coming, He comes to the earth (**Zech 14:4**).
  2. At the Rapture, reward and protection is the focus (**Rev 3:10**); at the Second Coming, judgment comes to those whom He visits (**Rev 19:15**).
  3. At the Rapture, there is no talk of establishing the millennial kingdom; at the Second Coming, the establishment of the millennial kingdom is the main objective (**Matt 25:31**).
  4. At the Rapture, saints (dead and alive) receive glorified bodies (**1 Cor 15:51**); at the Second Coming, there is no talk of church age saints receiving glorified bodies.
  5. At the Rapture, the event precedes God's wrath (**1 Thess 1:10**); at the Second Coming, the event follows His wrath poured out on the earth (**Rev 6–19**).
  6. At the Rapture, we are removed from the earth (**Jn 14:3**); at the Second Coming, we are taken to dwell on the earth (**Zech 14:5**).

## d. The Rapture of the Church Keeps the Church from God's Wrath

- i. **1 Thessalonians 1:10** "and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."
- ii. **1 Thessalonians 5:9** "For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, **10** who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him."

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- iii. **Revelation 3:10** “Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.”
- iv. In **Revelation 4 and 5** we see that the scroll (the title deed to the earth) is sealed securely. When the One who is worthy (the Lamb) opens the seals, God’s wrath on the earth commences (**Rev 6–19**). This seven-year period is the Tribulation, during which God pours out His wrath on the nations and saves a future generation of Israel. The church is not mentioned once in all John wrote about the Tribulation in the Book of Revelation.

## **Conclusion:**

Quick summary:

- The first event in the series of upcoming events is the rapture.
- The Lord returns from heaven and will suddenly and supernaturally remove the church.
- Those Christians who have died in this dispensation will experience bodily resurrection and have their souls united with their bodies.

*As you think about the rapture, what are some different ways to live in light of His return?*