



Eschatology – A Study of the End Times

Lesson 4: The Views of the Rapture

Introduction

Jesus promised His disciples that He would come again. For 2,000 years Christians have wondered about the events of the end times and the chronology of what will take place. However, not every Christian has come to the same conclusion on what is going to take place. Christians have asked questions such as: When is the church going to be raptured?; Will Christians go through a seven-year tribulation?; When will Christ return to the earth?; and Does Israel play a key role in the end times? Based upon one's understanding of Scripture will determine how these questions are answered. These answers also affect how one sees the timing of the events that are going to take place. In this lesson we are going to look at the different views regarding the timing of the rapture.

The Timing of the Rapture

What is the rapture of the church? Paul Enns in *The Moody Handbook of Theology* says, "The term *rapture* comes from the Latin translation, meaning "caught up," in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The rapture, which is distinguished from the second coming of Christ, is taught in John 14:1–3; 1 Corinthians 15:51–57; and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. Prior to the advent of the tribulation, Christ will descend from heaven, catching up the church to be with Himself while the tribulation is unleashed on an unrepentant and unbelieving world."¹ As we look at the timing of the events that are to come, the rapture is the next event to take place which will be the inauguration of the rest of the end times events. However, not all believers agree on the timing of the rapture. Because of this, there are different views concerning the timing of the rapture.

In order to understand the different views, we must first understand what the Bible teaches about the tribulation. The tribulation is a future seven-year period in which God will bring catastrophic judgment and wrath on the entire earth.² The tribulation is seen in the book of Daniel as the seventieth week, a week according to the prophet's terminology equating to seven years.³ This tribulation period will include the judgments of seals, trumpets, and bowls found in Revelation 6–16. The last half of the seven-year tribulation is known as the Great Tribulation (Matthew

¹ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology, Revised and Expanded* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 419.

² John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, gen. eds. *Biblical Doctrines: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 857.

³ Enns, 422.

parable. (2) This view comes close to a Protestant version of purgatory where some “unwatchful” Christians will have to endure God’s wrath because they are not yet fit for heaven. This denies the atonement of Christ for all who believe. (3) It denies the unity of the body of Christ. If a partial rapture is true, the body of Christ will be fragmented during the tribulation period. (4) It confuses the teaching on rewards. It teaches that the rapture is a reward for faithfulness instead of a promise for all believers.

Rapture View

The midtribulation rapture view teaches that the church will go through the first three and one-half years of the tribulation before being caught up to meet the Lord in the air. They teach that the first half of the tribulation does not represent the wrath of God. The believers who live during the first half of the tribulation will be spared from God’s wrath which only takes place during the last three and one-half years of the tribulation period. They teach that the two witnesses of Revelation 11 who are caught up to heaven after they are resurrected are representative of the church. They also identify the trumpet of Revelation 11:15 with the trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52.

The problems with this view are: (1) There is no indication that the two witnesses in Revelation 11 represent the church. (2) The identification of the trumpet of Revelation 11:15 with the trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52 is illogical. The trumpets of Revelation are sounded by angels and are meant for judgment, the trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52 is a blessing that results in resurrection and glorification. (3) The trumpet of Revelation 11:15 is near the end of the tribulation, not in the middle of the tribulation.⁷

The _____ Rapture View

The prewrath rapture view teaches that the rapture occurs toward the end of the tribulation period before the great day of wrath in Revelation 6:17. It argues that the church does not experience the wrath of God, and that the word *wrath* does not appear in Revelation until after the sixth seal. They teach that the seal judgments are not God’s wrath, but only the trumpet and bowl judgments are God’s wrath. Therefore, God’s wrath will not be poured out until the seventh seal in Revelation 6:12, meaning the rapture must take place between the sixth and seventh seal. They also teach that the first six seal judgments are not the wrath of God but are man’s persecution and “the wrath of Satan.”

The problem with this view is: (1) Scripture is clear that the entire seven-year period of the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments are the wrath of God. It is clear in Revelation 6:15 that those who hide themselves and cry to the rocks understand that they are under God’s wrath (Rev. 6:15–17). (2) In Revelation 5, no man could open the book with the seven seals. The only one who could open the seals is the Lamb, meaning the seals are not man’s judgment, but God’s. The tribulation begins when Jesus opens the first seal and from that point on, the wrath of God is unleashed.

⁷ Ron Rhodes, *The End Times in Complete Chronological Order: A Complete Overview to Understanding Bible Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2012), 52.

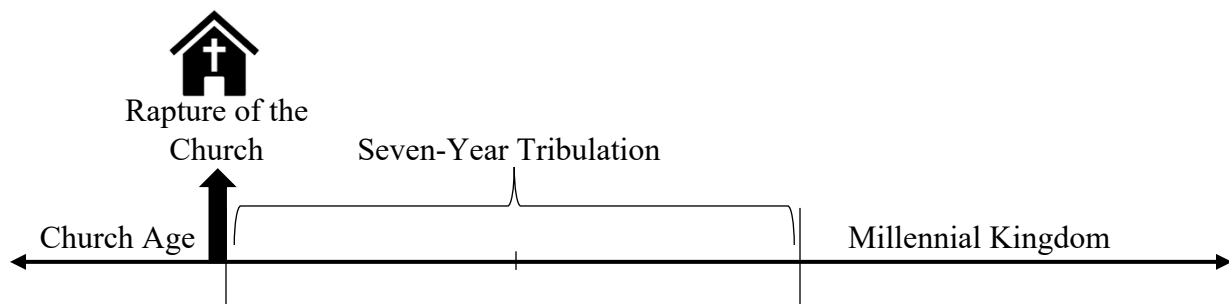
The _____ Rapture View

The posttribulation rapture view teaches that Christ will rapture the church after the tribulation period at His second coming. Paul Enns gives four variations of this view with a rebuttal to each one.⁸ The first variation is called “classic posttribulationism.” This teaches that the prophecies of the tribulation have already been fulfilled or are in the process of being fulfilled so that Christ can return at any moment. By allegorizing the tribulation, this view fails to see the seriousness of the events of Revelation 6–19.

The second variation is called “semi-classic posttribulationism” which teaches that the tribulation may be occurring now but certain aspects of it remain to be fulfilled in the future. Therefore, Christ’s return is not imminent. A third variation is called “futuristic posttribulationism” which sees a literal future tribulation and a rapture that will occur after that tribulation period. Therefore, Christ’s return is not imminent. Both variations fail to see the clear teaching in Scripture that Christ’s return is indeed imminent (1 Cor. 15:51–52; Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; Titus 2:13).

A fourth variation is called “dispensational posttribulationism” which teaches that the wrath to come is Satan’s wrath and not divine wrath. This view holds to the rapture occurring before the second coming of Christ to earth and does not see an imminent return of Christ. This view not only fails to see the imminent return of Christ taught in Scripture, but it also misunderstands the wrath to come during the tribulation period. The tribulation is the outpouring of God’s wrath, not man’s or Satan’s (Rom. 5:9; Rev. 6:16). Paul Enns states, “A serious problem with the posttribulation view is the question, who is left to populate the millennial kingdom?”⁹

After looking at the different views of the rapture, it is clear that a pretribulation rapture view is the most consistent with a literal approach to biblical prophecy. Some will argue that this view emerged late in church history and, therefore, the majority of church history knew nothing of this view. However, we would respond to those accusations by stating that the key issue is not when a view first emerged, but what view most aligns with the literal approach to interpreting Scripture.



⁸ Enns, 421.

⁹ Ibid.