

Will Christians Go Through the Great Tribulation?

by Rich Deem

Introduction

There is, and always has been great interest in the second coming of Christ within the Christian community. Before this century, the predominant interpretation of end-times events included a post tribulation rapture (removal of Christians from the Earth) of Christ's church. However, this interpretation has become unpopular recently, and has been replaced with a pre-tribulation rapture interpretation, which includes at least two "second comings" of Jesus - one to rapture believers and a second to defeat the forces of evil and establish His millennial kingdom on Earth. After years of studying this issue, I have great concern for the preparedness of Christians in the days to come. A pre-tribulation rapture scenario has much more appeal for Christians (since Christ delivers us before all the bad things begin to happen). However, if this interpretation is inaccurate, it can lead to a false sense of security, and a falling away by many if persecution of believers reaches unprecedented proportions before Christ's return.

In this page, we will examine what the Bible says about the rapture (the word itself is never used), tribulation events, God's wrath, and God's judgment. My goal is to include all relevant verses, so as not to bias the data. Once we have all the data, we will examine rapture interpretations to determine which scenario fits the data the best. If you feel that significant scriptures have been left out, send an e-mail to me and I will include them.

Tribulation vs Wrath

First, I think it is important to define the word "tribulation" and how this is related to God's wrath (anger and judgment. There are two Greek words most often used to describe tribulation events, and in many instances, they are used together in the same verse. The first word is *diwgmōs* (Strong's #G1375), which occurs 10 times in the New Testament and is translated "persecution(s)" in all major English translations. This word *always* refers to the persecution of believers by non-believers.¹ The second word is *thlipsis* (Strong's #G2347), which occurs 45 times in the New Testament and is translated "tribulation(s)," "affliction(s)," "anguish," "distress," "persecution," or "trouble." In 42 of these 45 occurrences, the word refers to the suffering believers received at the hands of non-believers.² One of the other 3 refer to the sufferings of Joseph when he was sold into slavery at the hands of his brothers,³ another to the sufferings of people during the famine of that time,⁴ and only one refers to the suffering of those who commit evil.⁵ On this basis alone, one would seem to be on shaky ground in assuming that the tribulation is reserved only for non-believers (since it only refers to non-believers in only 2% of all verses).

In contrast, two different Greek words are used to describe the suffering of non-believers at the hand of God. The first word is *thumos* (Strong's #G2372), which occurs in 18 verses in the New Testament and is translated "angry tempers," "fierce," "indignation," "outbursts of anger," "passion," "rage," and "wrath." In nine of those 18 verses, the term specifically refers to the anger and judgment of God against the unrighteous⁶ (the other 9 refer to the anger of people against each other⁷). The second word is *orgē* (Strong's #G3709), which occurs in 34 verses in the New Testament and is translated "anger" or "wrath." Twenty-eight of those verses refer to the wrath of God (or Jesus against the unrighteous,⁸ one refers to the persecution of believers,⁹ and five refer to anger of people against each other.¹⁰ Therefore, whereas tribulation almost always refers to the persecution of believers, wrath almost always refers to the anger of God against the unrighteous that results in punishment.

Events Preceding the End

Three of the four gospels tell of Jesus' description of the end time events. In addition, the book of Revelation describes these events in some detail (although not completely in a sequential order). The complete text of each description is given in the [references](#). The major events of these end times prophecies are included in the table below. The verse citations are color-coded and letter-labeled to indicate parallel passages in each account.

| Event | Matthew ¹¹ | Mark ¹² | Luke ¹³ | Revelation ¹⁴ |
|---|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| False Christs ^a | 24:5, 23-26 | 13:6, 21-23 | 21:8 | |
| Wars, famine, earthquakes ^b | 24:6-7 | 13:7-8 | 21:9-11 | 6:2-8, 12 |
| Tribulation of believers ^c | 24:9-10, 21-22 | 13:9-20 | 21:12 | 6:9-11 |
| Gospel preached to all nations ^d | 24:14 | 13:10 | | 14:6 |
| Astronomical signs ^e | 24:29 | 13:24-25 | 21:25 | 6:12, 8:12 |
| Return of Christ ^f | 24:30 | 13:26 | 21:27 | 1:7 |
| Rapture of believers ^g | 24:31 | 13:27 | 17:34-36 | 7:9-14 |

The Rapture

God promises to remove believers from the Earth prior to the time that He executes judgment against the unrighteous. The removal of believers prior to God's judgment has been called the rapture. Descriptions of the return of Christ and the rapture are found in three of the four gospels, the book of Acts,¹⁵ 1 Thessalonians,¹⁶ and the book of Revelation. It is mentioned in many other letters to the churches, but no significant additional information is included.

The descriptions given in the gospels are sequential, since many verses indicate a sense of order:

- Matthew 24:6 - "...but that is not yet the end"
- Matthew 24:8 - "But all these things are merely the beginning..."
- Matthew 24:14 - "And this gospel ... shall be preached in the whole world..., and then the end shall come"
- Matthew 24:29 - "But immediately after the tribulation of those days..."
- Matthew 24:30 - "and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky..."

Parallel passages in the other gospel indicate similar references to sequential events. The order of events clearly indicates that believers will go through the Great Tribulation. In addition, the text indicates that the days of tribulation (persecution of believers by non-believers) will be shortened by the Lord "for the sake of the elect" (i.e., believers). The Lord will announce His coming through astronomical signs and quickly gather together "His elect" (the rapture). Following these events, the wrath of God will be executed against the remaining non-believers.

The book of Revelation likewise indicates that believers will go through the tribulation. In chapter 6, believers killed for their faith ask how long it will be before God avenges their death. The answer is that they have to wait even until more believers are killed for their faith. Not only will believers be persecuted for their faith, but they will be killed because they are Christians (Revelation 6:11). This tribulation will be followed by astronomical signs and the "sealing" of 144,000 Jewish men who will be future Christian evangelists. Immediately after these men are "sealed", "a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues" suddenly appear in heaven (from the rapture). When one of the elders asks who all these people are, John answers that they are those "who come out of the great tribulation." Immediately after the rapture, the seventh seal is broken, and there is silence in heaven for 30 minutes before the wrath of God is poured out on the Earth.

Conclusions

From these studies, one can see that there is a significant difference between the wrath of God (which is judgment directed at the unrighteous) and the tribulation (which is the persecution directed at believers). Throughout the Bible, God is consistent in His treatment of humans. He allows individuals to choose between love and hate, and rarely interferes with that choice. At the times of the end, God will allow the unrighteous to persecute believers to an extent that "has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall," before ending their reign of terror. God then removes believers from the earth before executing judgment on the unrighteous. A complete description of this judgment can be found in the remainder of the book of Revelation (chapters 8-19). The ultimate fate of unbelievers can be found in chapter 20 of Revelation.¹⁷

My concerns for the Church

Having done this study, I am more convinced than ever that Christians will go through the Great Tribulation. Since much of the Church believes God will deliver them prior to the Great Tribulation, many believers will be surprised when they find themselves being persecuted and killed for their faith. Their faith will be severely tested, since they may believe that God has abandoned them and that the prophecies of the rapture are not true. Under such circumstances, most believers will fall away and deny their faith to save their lives. Jesus, in fact, made just such a prophecy:

"And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another.... "But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved. (Matthew 24:10, 13)

If you are a Christian, be prepared to die for your faith. Even your fellow "brothers" will deliver you to the authorities to avoid their own deaths. If you are not willing to die for what you believe, you will deny your faith when threatened with death. Be aware of what Jesus said about those who seek to save their lives:

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. (*Matthew 16:25*)

Many Christians are looking forward to the return of Christ, which will, indeed, be a glorious event. However, the time just preceding the end will not be pleasant for Christians. The watchful Christian should be prepared to join his fellow brothers under the altar of souls of those who will die "because of the testimony **which they had maintained**."

Links

- [Commentary on Revelation](#) - An excellent commentary of the entire book of Revelation, in addition to information on the rapture.
- [Eschatology by Scott](#) - A nice summary with tables of parallel passages.
- [Strong Tower Publishing](#) - Publisher of *Before God's Wrath*

More Resources

Before God's Wrath by H.L. Nigro, a friend of GodAndScience.org. This new book looks at the rapture question from the scriptures (both Old and New Testament). It is very well documented and includes many figures that compare parallel passages in the scriptures. It is endorsed by Marvin Rosenthal, President of Zion's Hope. According to Mr. Rosenthal, "Each month I receive dozens of articles and manuscripts to evaluate or endorse for publication. I do not endorse what I am not genuinely enthusiastic about. I am enthusiastic about this book. Within its pages, the readers will not find speculation or sensationalism. However, they will find a powerful and convincing presentation for the chronological sequence of the Lord's second coming and its practical implication for the believer." A highly recommended book!

The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church by Marvin J. Rosenthal. This is the classic pre-wrath interpretation of the Lord's second coming by Marvin Rosenthal, President of [Zion's Hope](#) and The Holy Land Experience.

The Rapture Question Answered: Plain and Simple by Robert D. Van Kampen

RAPTURE: Post-Tribulation and Pre-Wrath by Don Montgomery