

# The Church, Tribulation and Rapture<sup>1</sup>

- by R. Totten - © 1997

Events and trends around the world now seem to ever more clearly indicate the nearing end of this present age. It will end with a period of "Great Tribulation," which includes the terrible global reign of a Satan-possessed man called the Antichrist (1 Jn. 2:18). This period is climaxed and ended by the glorious physical Second Coming of Christ personally from heaven to earth in power and judgment (Mat.24). As Christ returns, dead believers are physically resurrected, and together with believers who have not died, the whole Church is "caught up" ("raptured") to meet the Lord in the sky (described in 1 Thess. 4:13-18). The "Church" is defined as: all truly born-again believers in Christ, worldwide, throughout history, who together make up the "body of Christ."

Concerning the rapture (the catching up of believers to meet Christ in the sky), intelligent and sincere Bible students disagree whether it will occur before (pre-), in the middle (mid-), or after (post-) the tribulation period, but regardless, it is not such a crucial teaching that it is worth disrupting fellowship between Christians over it. The chief task given to the Church, is to evangelize the lost world, who couldn't care less about the placement of the rapture. But it is still important, so that we know what to expect and what to hope for, as we look forward to Christ's return.

Currently, the pre-tribulation rapture teaching is possibly the most highly publicized position on the timing of the rapture, however the following facts should be realized: No passage anywhere in the entire Bible explicitly (directly and clearly) puts right before (or at the start of) the tribulation a single one of the constituent parts (events) that make up the rapture, such as :

- a "coming" of Christ,
- a resurrection of the saints (...or church, or believers)
- a translation (bodies changed & glorified)
- a gathering of believers (eg, by angels)
- a catching-up (rapture) of the saints
- or, a reception of saints by the Lord

As emphasized in the above list, the teaching of a pre-tribulation rapture is built virtually entirely on implication (reading "between the lines"), but not on direct and explicit teaching from the Bible. On the other hand, the New Testament **does** tell us explicitly and directly that :

- Christ will come again after the tribulation
- saints will be raised from the dead after the tribulation
- and, the elect will be gathered after the tribulation. (...see Mat.24:29-31)

Everybody agrees that the rapture occurs at the Lord's "coming," (1Thes.4:15-17) -----and yet, the New Testament only explicitly states that the Lord will come back to earth right **after** the tribulation, but never that he'll come before it. (Note: I'll pay a "gentleman's bet" of \$100 to any pre-tribber who can provide comparable scriptural evidence for the pre-trib rapture that is as explicit as the evidence given above for the post-trib position.) The post-tribulation position taken here is not new, in fact, the Church has believed this way for more than 19 centuries: The early Church, the Reformation leaders, and most great theologians have believed the Church would be persecuted by the Antichrist (the evil world dictator during the Great Tribulation), and then the rapture would occur at Christ's glorious Second Coming.

**THE EARLY CHURCH** - Those whom the apostles personally instructed, and those taught in turn by them, were most likely to know and adhere to the original teachings.

**Justin Martyr** (100 to 167 A.D.) lived near the time of the apostle John (died 100 A.D.); Justin taught the resurrection and rapture of believers would occur at the beginning of the millennium (Christ's 1000-year reign, which starts just after the Second Coming). Justin also wrote, "the man of apostasy [Antichrist] ...shall venture to do unlawful deeds on earth against us the Christians" (*Trypho cx*).

**Irenaeus** (130 to 200 A.D.) who said he held the actual apostles' teaching, wrote, "they [the ten kings of Rev. 17:1-13] shall ...give their kingdom to the beast [Antichrist], and put the Church to flight" (Against Heresies V, 26, 1). Irenaeus also said : "but he [John] indicates the number of the name [666 of Antichrist] now, that when this man comes we may avoid him, being aware who he is" ( *Against Heresies V*, 30, 4).

**Tertullian** (150 to 220 A.D.) attached the rapture of 1 Thessalonians 4, to the start of Christ's millennial kingdom on earth. Tertullian said the tribulation situation will be such "that the beast Antichrist with his false prophet may wage war on the Church of God" (*On the Resurrection of the Flesh xxv*).

**Cyprian** (200 to 260 A.D.) writes, "Nor let any of you, beloved brethren, be terrified by the fear of future persecution, by the coming of the threatening Antichrist" (*Epistle 55,7*). And we do well to take Cyprian's advice, since the Lord's grace is sufficient for true believers to be victorious in any situation.

**Pseudo-Ephraem** (perhaps 400 or 600 A.D.) was a man who "borrowed" materials from the real **Ephraem of Syria**, ---and some pre-tribulationists have taken several sentences out of context, in an attempt to say that there was an early date for the pre-tribulation rapture teaching. The main two sentences of Pseudo-Ephraem which are quoted, state : "Why therefore do we not reject every care of earthly actions and prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Christ, so that He may draw us from the confusion which overwhelms all the world? ... For all the saints and elect of God are

---

<sup>1</sup> C:\My Documents\SCHOOLofLocalChurch\Lessons\20Prophecy&End-Times\Articles\PostTrib13.doc

gathered, prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they ever see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sins." ---Note, that these quoted sentences do not mention a coming of the Lord, or a resurrection of the dead or a glorification (translation) or a heavenly destination of believers.

However, in a very solid and thorough analysis of the writings of both pseudo and real Ephraem, Dr. Robert Gundry (in his book, *"First the Antichrist"*, '97, Baker, p.161-188) concludes that in reality, "Pseudo-Ephraem urges Christians to forsake worldliness in *preparation* for meeting Christ when he returns **after** the great tribulation. Meanwhile, Christian evangelism is taking people to the Lord and gathering them into the Church. ... This interpretation takes account of Pseudo-Ephraem's leaving the corpses of **Christians** unburied **during** the tribulation, putting the resurrection of Christians and their meeting Christ at his coming **after** the tribulation to destroy the Antichrist, making **imminent** the advent of Antichrist rather than that of Christ, and utilizing the plainly and heavily post-trib tradition of true Ephraem, who repeatedly portrayed present-day evangelism as a gathering" (my emphases).

Not only did the early Church teach that the Church would face Antichrist, and that Christ would return at the beginning of the Millennium, but in all of Church history, there is never a pre-tribulation rapture teaching, until Edward Irving writes of it in the 1830s A.D. -----So, the pre-trib rapture teaching is only 170 years old (and the mid-trib teaching is even more recent).

**Outstanding Bible Teachers** in subsequent generations of Church history, who taught that the Church would encounter the persecution of the Antichrist here on earth before the Second Coming, include : John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Knox, John Bunyan, Isaac Newton, George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon, Charles Hodge, Henry Alford, J.Sidlow Baxter, F.F. Bruce, Thomas Chalmers, Adam Clarke, Jonathan Edwards, Jim Elliott, W.J. Erdman, Robert Gundry, Carl F. Henry, Matthew Henry, John Huss, Orson Jones, C.S. Lovett, J.Gresham Machen, Peter Marshall, Walter Martin, Gary Matsdorf, G.Campbell Morgan, Leon Morris, George Mueller, Ian Murray, B.W. Newton, John Newton, H.J. Ockenga, Bernard Ramm, Alexander Reese, A. Saphir, Demos Shakarian, A.B. Simpson, Oswald J. Smith, Jim Spillman, R.C. Sproul, Charles Spurgeon, Corrie TenBoom, S.P. Tragelles, William Tyndale, B.B. Warfield, Charles Wesley, R.F. Youngblood, -----and premillennial posttribulationists also include : Bengel, Brooks, Cameron, Delitzsch, Derstine, DeWette, Ellicott, Ewald, Frost, Godet, Godwin, Joyner, Kellogg, Moorehead, Orelli, Robertson, Rothe, Ryle, Spener, Stier, Trench, Volck, Van Ostersee, West, Whiston, Zahn, and many more. -----In looking at the whole history of the Christian Church, the overwhelming majority of great Bible-teachers have believed that the Church would encounter Antichrist, and that the rapture and the Second Coming would happen at the same time ...after the tribulation. -----But still, any teaching should stand or fall, not because of its antiquity, or a majority believing it, but as it lines up with the truth of the Scriptures.

**CHRIST'S ARRIVAL: THE "PAROUSIA"** - The New Testament Greek word "Parousia" (pronounced pah-roo-SEE-ah), when used concerning Christ, is a specialized or "technical term," since it speaks "nearly always of his Messianic advent in glory to judge the world at the end of the age" (*Greek-English Lexicon* by Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, p.635); in fact, 16 of the 17 usages are like this. This word was used in NT times to indicate the coming of a ruler or official who was just arriving at a city to be with the people there. In English translations of the Bible, Christ's Parousia is usually translated as his "coming," but it must include the idea of his "arrival" to earth in order to be physically "present" with people on earth. ----Considering the verses which speak of Christ's Parousia, is highly informative on his Second Coming and the rapture.

In 1 Cor. 15:23, Paul brings out that the resurrection of believers in Christ will happen "at his Parousia" ("when he comes"). Then in 1 Thes. 4, where Paul describes the Parousia ("coming") of the Lord (v.15), we read that this is the time of the saint's resurrection and rapture (v.16,17). The resurrection and rapture of the saints (born again believers) is connected to and is part of the Parousia. Adding to this concept, historically, : "When a dignitary paid an official visit or parousia to a city in Hellenistic times, the action of the leading citizens in going out to meet him and escorting him on the final stage of his journey was called the **apentesis**..." (F.F.Bruce, in *New Bible Commentary*, ©'70, p.1159)(my emphasis).

In harmony with this historical picture, Paul states in 1Thess.4 that the resurrected and transformed saints will be caught up (raptured) to "meet (apentesis) the Lord in the air" (v.17), in order to escort him on the last little portion of his arrival to earth at the Parousia, which is the glorious Second Coming. If Jesus were to snatch these people away from the earth, it would not fit with the picture portrayed by these two Greek words (parousia & apentesis). In 1 Thess. 3:13, it is because of Christ's catching up of believers into the air, followed by their meeting and escorting (apentesis) of him as he comes to earth, that Paul says the Parousia (coming & arrival) of our Lord Jesus is "with all his holy ones," as he descends to the earth.

In 2 Thess. 2:8, Paul looks ahead to the end of the Great Tribulation as he mentions the destruction of the Antichrist "whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his Parousia (coming)." ...This verse clearly tells us that the Parousia (which includes the saint's resurrection and rapture) will be the powerful event which will destroy the Antichrist at the end of the Great Tribulation. Jesus also depicts his Parousia as glorious and powerful: "For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the Parousia of the Son of Man" (Mat. 24:27). The Parousia will be gloriously visible to the whole world. -----So, it is clear from all of this, that the reign and authority of Antichrist will extend right up to, and be ended by, Christ's Parousia. The Parousia is Christ's powerful and glorious Second Coming -----during which the rapture of believers will also occur.

**One further note:** We are told in James 5:7,8 to be patient and to stand firm as we wait "until the Lord's Parousia." James knew things would get tough for Christians before the Parousia, but it will be at the Parousia that our

relief will come. ----And also John exhorts perseverance: "dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his Parousia" (1 Jn. 2:28).

**ANTICIPATING THE DAY OF THE LORD** - The "Day of the Lord" in Scripture is that marvelous day to which all true believers should look forward, ...and even work to hasten its coming (2 Pet. 3:11-12). We look forward to it, because the "Day of the Lord" will be the day of our salvation (1 Thess. 5:2-9) and physical redemption of our bodies, when the Lord Jesus will be "revealed from heaven ...in flaming fire" (2Thess.5:7). ----The Day of the Lord will begin with the descent of the Lord at his Second Coming, and the Rapture (catching up) of all true believers (read 2Thess.2:1-8 & 1Thess. 4:15- 5:2), and it will extend right on through the 1000-year millennium (Joel 2:32- 3:1 & 3:16-21 ; and Zech.14). It is "the day" believers should look forward to in holy self-control and spiritual alertness (1 Thess. 5:2-8). ----So, why must we be so spiritually alert up until that "day"? Because we won't yet be glorified, but we'll still be struggling against our sinful flesh until that Day finally comes. But, we can be confident that the Lord will keep us strong "to the end" (1 Cor. 1:8), and blameless until "the Day" arrives, when all spiritual maturity will be completed in us (Phlp. 1:6,10).

So, when will the "Day of the Lord" begin? The major key to pinpointing its start, is to look at the great heavenly portents (signs) that Jesus and Joel spoke of. These heavenly signs are : the darkening of the sun and moon, along with the "falling" of stars, and the "shaking" of other heavenly bodies. Jesus clearly said that these signs would follow "immediately **after**" the Great Tribulation (read Mat. 24:29), and Joel said that these same heavenly signs would occur just **before** the Day of the Lord (see Joel 2:30-31 & 3:14-16).

----Placed in order, then, the Great Tribulation must be completed before these heavenly signs appear, and the signs appear just before the Day of the Lord begins. Thus, the Day of the Lord comes **after** the Great Tribulation, with the heavenly portents inbetween. And as was demonstrated earlier, the Day of the Lord begins with the glorious Second Coming of Christ, along with the rapture; ----and in fact, Jesus quite nicely describes the rapture (a catching up of the saints) as following those heavenly portents after the great tribulation (Mat.24:30-31). Therefore, Christ's Second Coming, along with the rapture, cannot be imminent until these post-tribulational heavenly portents (signs) are occurring. Therefore, Paul says, "you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief" (v.4). Why not? ...Because the Scriptures give us the signs to look for just before "the Day" begins.

We also know the Parousia (with rapture) comes as part of the Day of the Lord, because in 2 Thess. 2:1-2 the normal flow of Paul's sentence moves smoothly and naturally from speaking of the Lord's Parousia (coming) and rapture ("being gathered") in verse 1, right on to "the Day of the Lord" in verse 2, without a transition in thought. This shows us that in Paul's mind, the Parousia and the beginning of the Day of the Lord, are linked right together as happening together. Clearly, the Day of the Lord is "the" hopeful "day" of all believers' glorification and rapture (1 Cor. 15:50-52).

**THE LAST TRUMPET** - When we consider all the NT passages which speak of a trumpet sounding in relation to the glorious Second Coming of Christ, there is excellent agreement among them, indicating that the same last trumpet is spoken of. In Matthew ch.24, when Jesus speaks of this time, he says that immediately after the Great Tribulation, there will be awesome heavenly portents (v.29), and he will then be "coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory, and he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds" (v.30, 31). This trumpet heralds the Lord's Parousia ("coming" in v.27), including the rapture (gathering of the elect), and we see that his angels are part of the catching up of the saints.

This is very similar to 1 Thess. 4, where Paul says that at the Parousia ("coming" in v.15), "the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, and with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first" (v.16), and then the rapture occurs (v.17). It is easy to note several parallels between this and Matthew 24.

Again, in harmony with the two passages above, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul writes of the time of the believer's resurrection and change to a new, spiritual body: "We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed ---- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed" (v.51-52). At the time of the believer's resurrection, we again read that there will be a trumpet sounded... but Paul adds here that it is the last trumpet ...which coordinates perfectly with the passages in Revelation, which we will consider next.

As John describes the tribulation period just before the Second Coming, in Revelation 8:6 through 11:15, he writes that seven trumpets will sound. When we read the contents of the seventh (or last) trumpet in Rev. ch.11, we read of loud voices declaring that "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (v.15), and the heavenly elders also declare, "you have taken your great power and have begun to reign" (v.17). This celebration of the commencement of Christ's reign on earth, pinpoints Christ's glorious Second Coming as taking place at the sounding of the seventh trumpet in this series of trumpets. This is the last trumpet, just as Paul had said in 1 Corinthians 15. The agreement here is good.

Some may find it confusing that after this seventh trumpet, John further describes tribulational events in Revelation, but there is a very good explanation. In his book, *The Church and the Tribulation*, (Zondervan, © 1973), Robert Gundry brings out that in all three series, the Seals (Rev.6), Trumpets (Rev.8-11), and Bowls of Wrath (Rev.16), the seventh item in each series occurs at the Second Coming of Christ. Gundry points out that this arrangement is favored by the "Semitic style of Revelation ...according to which the seals, trumpets, and bowls will find somewhat

concurrent fulfillment." Also, the fact that later descriptions "add more detail is a well-recognized feature of narrational style in Semitic literature" (Gundry, p.75).

Note, for example, that we find this same Semitic literary technique in the creation account, where creation is overviewed in Genesis 1:1, and then, the creation process is fully outlined in Genesis 1:2 - 2:2. Finally, in a third outline of creation in Genesis 2:2-25, a different but compatible viewpoint is brought out, which runs concurrently with the previous two, but with a different focus. So, the seals, trumpets and bowls would start at different times, run concurrently and all end together at the Second Coming, approximately thus:

SEALS:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
TRUMPETS:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
BOWLS:						1234567	

(Note: The sevens should line up straight, but different computer monitors change the format alignment) Note some advantages in the above arrangement: The seals, trumpets and bowls increase in frequency and severity, similar to birthpangs (Mat.24:8); The sixth bowl (Rev.16:12-16) is preparatory for the sixth trumpet (Rev.9:13-16); And the sixth seal (Rev.6:12-14) fits in very well with the post-tribulational portents (signs) that Joel and Christ spoke of, which come just before Christ's glorious Second Coming ( Joel 2:30-31 & Mat.24:29-31) to set up his kingdom on earth (Rev. 11:15-18). So, the seventh item from each of the three series, all happen together at the time of the Second Coming ...even the seventh seal's "silence in heaven for half an hour" (Rev.8:1) occurs at this time, which is reasonable if the Lord Jesus along with all the heavenly armies have gone to earth for a time during the Second Coming.

**KEY WORD STUDIES** - It is very informative to focus on three special Greek words that impact the discussion on the rapture and the Second Coming.

The first word, "**Epiphany**" means "the visible appearance of the Lord Jesus on earth at the end" of the age (ref: *New Int'l. Dict. of N.T. Theology*, Vol.3, Colin Brown, p.319). To the ancients, this word indicated the appearance of God on earth, so that humans see him there. The "*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*," (by Bauer, Arndt & Gingrich, 1957, p.304), states that the Greek word "epiphany" means "a visible manifestation of a hidden divinity," and in the literature of NT times, the word speaks "only of Christ's appearing on earth." In addition, Arndt & Gingrich's lexicon states that 1Tim.6:14 ; 2Tim. 4:1,8 ; Titus 2:13 ; and 2Thess. 2:8 all speak "of Jesus' coming in judgment." ----- Thus, taken all together, the "epiphany" of Jesus can be nothing other than the glorious and visible Coming of Christ when he ends up among people on the earth in judgment ...which is clearly post-tribulational.

Paul exhorts Timothy to "keep this commandment without spot or blame until the appearing (epiphany) of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Tim.6:14). So, Paul is saying to persevere faithfully until the big goal is reached : the post-trib epiphany. ----In addition, Paul declares that it is the "epiphany" of Christ's "parousia" which destroys the Antichrist (2Thess.2:8), therefore, it is the glorious epiphany (appearing) of Christ the God-man on earth which destroys the Antichrist just after the end of the great tribulation. -----And then, Paul tells Titus: "we wait for the blessed hope ----the glorious appearing (epiphany) of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). Thus, the "blessed hope" we look to and wait for is not some secret disappearance before the great tribulation (as in the pre-trib or mid-trib rapture), but rather, it is the glorious and visible epiphany of Christ's Coming to earth in judgment (at which time the Antichrist is destroyed) ...which is post-tribulational.

The second word, "**Apocalypse**," is the disclosure and "revelation of Christ when he appears in the fullness of his power" (ref: *New Int'l Dict. of N.T. Theology*, Vol.3, Colin Brown, p.315). In addition, Arndt and Gingrich's Greek-English Lexicon (cited above, & p.92) states that when this word "apocalypse" is used to talk about Christ in eschatology (the last days/last things), it speaks of "the parousia," (see "parousia" in the first half of this article). ----- Clearly, this word "apocalypse" ("revelation") is the powerful and glorious post-trib Coming of Christ, when he appears and is revealed to the whole world (Rev.19:11-16 & Mat.24:29-31), ...and Paul uses this word when he says, "do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed (apocalypse)" (1 Cor.1:7). -----So, were the Corinthians and Paul eagerly waiting for a "secret rapture," where all the believers simply disappear? -----No. They were looking and waiting for the powerfully glorious "apocalypse" or appearing of Christ ...which can only be post-tribulational. (& See the section below on "Relief").

Peter also uses this word, "apocalypse" , as he writes: "trials... come so that your faith ...may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (apocalypse)" (1 Pt. 1:7). -----When do pre-tribulationists expect this praise and honor to come from the Lord Jesus? At the pre-trib rapture. ...But that's not when Peter says it will come. He says it will come at the apocalypse, when Christ is revealed to the world in the fullness of his power. Peter continues: "set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed (apocalypse)" (1 Pt.1:13). -----So, your hope is to be riveted on the apocalypse ...which is clearly post-tribulational.

The third word, "**PHANEROO**," (pronounced "fawn-air-AHH-oh") means "to reveal, manifest;" ---and according to Colin Brown it is used as a synonym for the above word we studied : "apocalypse" (*DNTT*, Vol.3, Colin Brown, p.321). Arndt & Gingrich (cited, & on p.860) write that "phaneroo" indicates Christ's "appearance **in the world**." The apostle Peter writes: "when the Chief Shepherd appears (phaneroo), you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (1 Pet.5:4). -----And when will this crown of glory be given to believers? While the tribulation is taking place on the earth below? No. Believers will receive their "crown of glory" at the time of the phaneroo-apocalypse, when Christ appears and is revealed on the earth, ...which is post-tribulational.

John says, "continue in him, so that when he appears (phaneroo) we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming (parousia)" (1 Jn.2:28). So, when will we ultimately need the confidence of having faithfully followed

Christ?...and when will the Lord "size us up"? It won't be some time during the tribulation, but when he gloriously appears ("phaneroo") at the apocalypse and the post-trib parousia (see parousia section). Finally, John says, "when he appears (phaneroo), we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn.3:2). And when will this happen, that believers will "become like" Jesus, or in other words, be glorified in resurrected bodies? Will it be just before (or in the middle of) the tribulation? ---No. According to the inerrant word written down by John, it will be at the phaneroo-apocalypse ...which is post-tribulation.

**RELIEF** - A very telling scripture in regard to the rapture, is found in 2 Thess. 1:5-10. As Paul writes, he is talking about the earthly suffering and persecution of the Church (vs.1), and he includes himself in this persecuted group (v.7). But Paul then says that God will pay back the persecutors of the Church, and that the Church will be relieved from this suffering and persecution ...and when will this relief happen? "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed (apocalypse) from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels" (v.7). Pre- and Mid- tribulationists are expecting their relief from the world's persecutions at some secret rapture time before the tribulation's end, which would not be Christ's glorious coming. But Paul expected his relief to come at the glorious revelation or "apocalypse" of Christ (see word study above), which can only be the coming of Christ in great power and judgment, just after the Great Tribulation. The glorious apocalypse is also described in 1 Pet. 1:7,13, in 1 Cor. 1:7 and in Revelation 19:11-18. It is at this apocalypse that our relief comes, and no sooner. Although the Church will face persecution at the hands of Antichrist, Christians must not let fear keep them from facing the truth, but instead, should let God's love cast out all fear.

**TRIBULATION SAINTS "IN" CHRIST** - The fact that there are many saints (true believers in Jesus) on earth who face Antichrist during the Tribulation, is not disputed (Rev. 7:9-14; 13:7,10; 14:12,13; 17:6; 20:4). Pre-tribulationists, however, feel that the entire body of Christ (the Church) will have been raptured just before the beginning of the Tribulation, and that there can be no Church on earth during the tribulation, so these "tribulation saints" we speak of in the above verses, would not be part of the body of Christ (the Church). ----However, those who teach this pre-trib view may not realize that as they try to propose a group of Jesus-believing, blood-bought, New Testament saints "in" Christ, which are not part of the Church (Christ's body), this brings up very serious problems concerning the doctrines of justification, reconciliation and redemption ...indeed, such a viewpoint puts the biblical doctrine of salvation under attack.

The sacrifice of Christ benefits any truly repentant sinners who have sincere faith and trust in Christ, but this benefit is conferred as God automatically baptizes all true believers in the Holy Spirit, which places them "into" the Body of Christ (1Cor.12:13), which is the Church (Eph.1:22,23), so that they are "**IN** Christ" (2Cor.5:17). Being "**in** Christ" is the place of justification (Gal.2:17), redemption and forgiveness of sins (Eph.1:7). What's more, Paul teaches that a person who is in the body of Christ, has died to the requirements and condemnation of the OT law (Rom. 7:4,6) -- --and thus, anyone who is not in the body of Christ remains condemned by the law (Rom.2:12 ; Gal.3:10-11 ; Jas.2:10). There is no other place, than in Christ's body, for those spiritual transactions in the NT. It will only be people "**in** Christ" (and in his body), who have been crucified with him, who have died and been buried with him, and are made alive with him (read Rom.6:1-10). For anyone to be saved, God places Jews or Gentiles "**in** this one **body** to reconcile both of them to God through the cross" (Eph.2:16)... and that one body of reconciliation is the Church (Eph.1:22-23). There will never be any other way to justification, reconciliation to God, redemption, resurrection and eternal life, than by being "**IN** Christ," which is in his body, the Church ...anything else is another way (and really, another gospel) than is found in the Bible. ...It would take some major explaining to tell how a person could be "in Christ" but not in his body. If the tribulation saints are not in Christ's body, then how are they saved? ----Consider especially verses like Romans 12:5, which says, "so **in** Christ we who are many form one **body**." Paul says explicitly there that being "in" Christ means being in his "body", and he uses those two ideas as being inseparable. ----Biblical Christianity can never advance any other way of justification and redemption, other than being "**IN** Christ."

So, the pre-trib notion of a group of "tribulation saints" who are saved and redeemed during the tribulation, but yet are not part of the body of Christ (the Church), is actually a contradiction in terms, which rests on very shabby theology that undermines the biblical doctrine of salvation. ----The true situation during the tribulation will be: there will be Spirit-baptized saints who are "washed ...in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev.7:14), so, they are blood-bought and justified saints; they will be born-again Christians "who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (Rev.12:17), and who "remain faithful to Jesus" (Rev.14:12). ...And very crucial for this discussion: note those saints who "die **IN** the Lord" during the Great Tribulation (see Rev.14:12-13 with 6:9-11) ...remembering from our previous discussion, that being "in the Lord," or "in Christ," is precisely the NT description of a believer who is part of the Church, the body of Christ. There is no possible way that these tribulation saints are not part of the Church.

The corporate body of Christ first came into being when believers were first baptized in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5 & 2:1-4). Since then, every true believer is automatically placed into the body of Christ by the Baptism in the Holy Spirit (1Cor.12:13), so that they are "**in** Christ" (and this must now include all Old Testament saints, as well as tribulation saints). Redemptive union with Christ, in his body (the Church), has always been God's plan for all believers of all ages. Paul says that Jesus is the Savior of "his **body**" (Eph.5:23), and it would take some major explaining to show that he is the Savior of anybody else. Anybody who is not part of the body of Christ, therefore, will not be saved. Jew or Gentile, there is no other provision in all of eternity for the salvation of sinners other than by being in the body of Christ. ----So, unavoidably, since there are saved people on earth during the tribulation, the body of Christ, the Church, must be present on earth at that time. Obviously, those who "die in the Lord" during the

tribulation will be part of Christ's body, the Church, and they too (like all who are in Christ) will rise at the first resurrection and be raptured (1 Thess.4:16-18). Thus, the rapture must follow the tribulation, during which those tribulation saints "die IN the Lord."

**SAINTS UNDER GOD'S WRATH?** - Some Bible students are deeply concerned that since members of Christ's body (the Church) will be present on earth during the tribulation, they would be subject to God's wrath ...but this is an unnecessary concern. No saint in any place or time will ever be subject to God's wrath (1 Thess.5:9). In fact, right now, at this very moment today before the tribulation, "God's wrath is being revealed from heaven against all the... wickedness of men" (Rom.1:18 and 1 Thess.2:16), and this present wrath of God never touches a single saint. We have already established that the "tribulation saints" are IN Christ, and justified "by his blood" (Rev.7:14), so it would likewise be impossible that they would be subject to God's tribulational wrath or any other divine wrath.

In contrast, however, God's tribulational (& post-tribulational) wrath will be poured out upon the "earth-dwellers" (Rev.8:13) who are of the earth, and the bowls of tribulational wrath (Rev.16) will be poured out only on the wicked who take the mark and worship the beast (v.2) and kill the saints, and blaspheme God, and refuse to repent (v.8-11). This is remarkably similar to the plagues of the Exodus that affected the Egyptians but not Israel ...in fact, in Revelation 15, those who are victorious over the Antichrist, sing "the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb" (Rev.15:3). Then finally, far from being touched by God's wrath, the saints will be raptured, and join in with the armies of heaven as the returning Christ comes to judge, and "treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God" (Rev.19:11-21), and, along with Christ, "the saints will judge the world" (1 Cor. 6:2-3).

Although tribulation saints will experience very tough times, persecution and death from Antichrist during the tribulation, they will abide under the sufficient grace of God, and never his wrath, setting their hope on their soon-coming Lord Jesus.

**SAINTS TO FACE ANTICHRIST** - As we have established, there will be New Testament saints on earth during the Great Tribulation: blood-bought, justified, Holy Spirit-baptized saints IN Christ ...members of his body, the Church. It is unavoidable. They will be protected from God's wrath, but in Revelation 13 we see that the Antichrist (beast) will be permitted for 3 1/2 years "to make war against the saints and to conquer them" (v.5,7). Daniel makes the same point, agreeing that the saints will be subject to him for 3 1/2 years (Dan. 7:21,25). We have already determined that the event which destroys the Antichrist, is the glorious Second Coming of Christ, ...therefore the time of Antichrist's great persecution of the Church, is the 3 1/2 years of the Great Tribulation just before the Second Coming. We must remember, however, that even though we know the duration of this persecution under Antichrist, we still will not be able to pinpoint the day or hour of the Lord's Coming (Mat.24:36), because Jesus said that "those days (of the great tribulation) will be "cut off" (Mat.24:21-22 & Mk.13:19-20). So, God won't allow the full 3 1/2 years to run out their course, and we don't know how many days he'll cut off. (See answer to this in "Rapture FAQs").

Though the Antichrist will "conquer" the saints in physical, political, and economic terms, this will not be the whole story. The Church will still faithfully carry the gospel to all nations, and then the end will come (Mat.24:14). And not all Christians will die: Some will live until the Parousia (coming) of the Lord (1 Thess.4:15). The saints will be the ONLY people on earth guaranteed to resist and not to worship the Antichrist (Rev.13:8), and to resist taking the mark (Rev.14:9-12). The saints are the only ones who will not be deceived by the satanic deceit and powerful delusions of the Antichrist (2 Thess.2:9-12). Through all the Devil's attacks in the tribulation, believers "overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (Rev.12:11).

**IN SUMMARY** - Whereas there is no explicitly clear scriptural evidence which places any component parts of the rapture before the tribulation period, ----there is explicit and direct evidence for a resurrection of believers at the start of the millennium (Rev.20:4), and explicit statements of the post-tribulational coming of Christ "on the clouds" with glory, and with a trumpet call, and with a "gathering" up of the elect (Christians) by angels (Mat.24:29-31). Evidence for a supposed pre-tribulational rapture is not clear and direct like this, but is only inferred by implications of different sorts.

Although Antichrist will persecute the Church during the Great Tribulation (the 3 1/2 years just before the glorious Second Coming of Christ), still, all the saints will overcome him spiritually by remaining faithful to Christ, and some saints will live through to Christ's Parousia (arrival to earth). When the Parousia happens, Christ appears in power, glory and wrathful judgment, the dead in Christ are raised, all Christians are caught up to meet Christ in the sky (raptured), the Antichrist is overthrown by the bright appearance of the "Parousia," and Christ lands on earth with all his saints, to begin his Millennial kingdom. ----This viewpoint is classic Christian theology. It has been so held for almost 20 centuries, since the apostles and early Church fathers, and thus is called "historic" Pre-millennialism. May the Lord guide and bless his saints to glorify him in the momentous days apparently soon to be on us. Come quickly, Lord Jesus!

**For further reading:**

The best book I've ever seen concerning the time of the Rapture at the Second Coming, is : "The Church and the Tribulation" by Robert F. Gundry, Zondervan, 1973. However, since the above book is out of print, you may need to read : "First the Antichrist," by Robert Gundry, Baker Books, 1997.