

The Rapture, When?

By Jeffery A. Mott

If you are like most Christians, you have probably heard about the removal of the church known as the rapture many times. This removal is popularly taught as occurring before the seven years of the tribulation (known as a pre-tribulation rapture). You may have heard some teachers saying there are others teaching false doctrines regarding this event. Some are even saying that to believe anything other than a pre-tribulation rapture you must ignore the scriptures. Many scriptural references are provided to support the pre-tribulation rapture position, but if you have read any of these references, you may have found that none of them tell you "the rapture will happen at this time or that time." Others are indeed telling of "mid-tribulation, post-tribulation, and pre-wrath" rapture options. The fact that there are other voices caused me to wonder: Which rapture teaching really agrees with the scriptures? I wanted to set aside all the hype and just see what God's word said - without any preconceived ideas - just seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

To get an understanding that comes from God's word and not from our own expectations of God's plan, we need to see what each scriptural reference is really talking about. We also need to establish what events take place for each verse and when they occur.

Lets start with the favorite verse quoted to support the rapture of the church at the start of the tribulation:

1TH 4:16-18: *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*

Sequence of Events:

- 1 The Lord descends
- 2 A shout, voice, trump
- 3 The dead rise
- 4 The living caught up

Timing: Nothing specifies a particular time for these events.

In this verse we found nothing conclusive to be used to identify the specific time when the rapture might occur except that it follows the Lord's descent from heaven and the sounding of the trumpet of God.

Lets take a look at another very popular verse about the rapture of the church:

1CO 15:51-52: *Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

Sequence of events:

- 1 The trumpet sounds
- 2 The dead rise
- 3 The living changed

Timing: Begins with the "last trump"

The trump identified as the "last trump" seems to be the cause of these events. This appears to indicate that other trumpets will sound before this one, but none after it. Could this be the final (seventh trumpet found in revelations)? If so, that would put it at or near the end of the tribulation. Wait a minute! This isn't what is being taught about the rapture of the church. Are there any other verses that can help clarify this matter? Yes! In fact, Jesus himself explains to his disciples what to expect in the end times. There are two sets of verses regarding Jesus explanation:

MAT 24:29-31 *Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

Sequence of events:

- 1 The tribulation ends
- 2 Sun, moon darkened - stars fall
- 3 The sign of the Son of man seen - Son of man coming
- 4 Angels sent with sound of trumpet
- 5 Elect gathered from four winds (earth) and one end of heaven to the other

Timing: The coming of the Son of man and his gathering of the elect follows the darkness at the end of the tribulation.

MAR 13:24-27 *And the second set of verses covering Christ's description of the end times: But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.*

Sequence of events:

- 1 The tribulation ends
- 2 Sun, moon darkened - stars fall
- 3 The Son of man seen coming
- 4 Angels sent
- 5 Elect gathered from the four winds (earth) and uttermost part of heaven

Timing: Again, the Son of man's coming and the gathering of his elect follows the darkness at the end of the tribulation.

In both these references we see it clearly states that the tribulation will end with the sun and moon darkened and the stars falling. After all the people of the world see the sign of the Son of man, he causes the sounding of the trumpet and sends his angels to gather both the dead (in heaven) and the living (on earth) saints. There should be little doubt left here, that Jesus says these events occur after the tribulation.

Are there any other scriptures that can either confirm or refute this conclusion? Yes:

REV 11:15-18 *And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.*

Sequence of events:

- 1 The seventh (last) trumpet of the tribulation sounds.
- 2 The earthly reign of Christ begins.
- 3 The time of the dead (resurrection).
- 4 Prophets, and saints judged for rewards.
- 5 Those who destroy the earth are destroyed

Timing: Beginning with the seventh trumpet of the tribulation.

The seventh and final trumpet of the period of the tribulation is sounded and the reign of Christ begins on earth. At this time the resurrection and judgment of the saints occurs - after the tribulation. This seems to confirm our previous conclusion. One more verse for further confirmation or refutation:

REV 20:4-6 *And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.*

Sequence of events:

- 1 The first resurrection (this includes people who are killed during the tribulation for not worshipping the beast or receiving his mark.
- 2 Those who are resurrected reign 1000 years with Christ.
- 3 The rest of the dead rise after the 1000 years is finished
- 4 The second death (For those who are not part of the first resurrection)

Timing: Begins after the people are beheaded for their witness of Jesus, and for not worshipping the beast or receiving his mark, but before the thousand year reign of Christ.

Here we can clearly see that there will be people who have been executed during the tribulation present at the first resurrection. This can only occur if the resurrection occurs after the tribulation. These are the people who reign with Christ for a thousand years. If there is a pre-tribulation rapture, then these people are raised before the first official resurrection, they may not reign with Christ, and they may even be subject to the second death! Clearly, a pre-tribulation rapture requires that these verses must either be refuted or ignored.

Another scripture frequently used to support a pre-tribulation rapture needs to be reviewed to insure there is not true conflict:

2TH 2:1-8 *Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who*

opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

Sequence of events:

- 1 A spiritual falling away.
- 2 He who now letteth (hinders or restrains) is taken out of the way.
- 3 The man of sin is revealed in the temple.
- 4 The coming of our lord Jesus Christ and our gathering unto him.

Timing: Just before the middle of the seven year period of the tribulation when the antichrist is revealed.

As I said, this reference is used to show that the church must be raptured before the tribulation. They go directly to verses 7 and 8 and state that he that letteth (restrains) is the Holy Spirit who is in every believer and that when he (the Holy Spirit) is taken out of the way, (so the wicked one can be revealed) those in whom he dwells must also be removed in the rapture. Verse 4 says that the gathering comes after the falling away and the man of sin is revealed. How can this be if the gathering occurs first, removing the Holy Spirit and believers? Obviously it can't. There are 447 verses dealing with the spirit and there is not one reference in which the Holy Spirit is fighting, restraining, or any other adversarial task.

The Holy Spirit seems to have three tasks:

- 1 to comfort believers,
- 2 to teach believers the meaning of the Word of God and most importantly,
- 3 convict sinners of their sin. If the Holy Spirit is removed, who will convict the sinners who are saved during the tribulation? If the Holy Spirit is not "he who letteth," then who is?

There are but seven verses about **Michael, the Archangel** and yet he is fighting against principalities and powers in each one. It is therefore more likely that it is Michael who now restrains the Devil and will do so until told to throw him out of heaven to the earth:

REV 12:6-12 *And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days. And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.*

Sequence of events:

- 1 The woman (Israel) flees into the wilderness (her stay is 1260 days or about 3 1/2 years.)
- 2 Michael & his angels fight a war with Satan & his angels.
- 3 Satan looses and he & his angels are cast out of heaven down to the earth.
- 4 Rejoicing in heaven.
- 5 Sorrow expressed for earth's inhabitants.

Timing: The middle of the seven year period of the tribulation about the time Israel flees into the mountains.

Note that it is Michael who does battle with Satan, so it could also be him who God has appointed to "let" or withhold Satan's power. Is there any confirmation that Michael is the one who now restrains Satan's power? Yes!

DAN 12:1 *And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.*

Sequence of events:

- 1 Michael "stands up."
- 2 A time of great trouble (tribulation) begins.
- 3 Thy people (written in the book) shall be delivered.

Timing: The middle of the seven year period of the tribulation about the time the "great trouble" begins.

So we see here that when Michael "stands up" he delivers those written in the book through a time of great trouble. Since Michael also fights the war with Satan and throws him out of heaven, it is clear that Michael is who restrains Satan now. Also note that the view of the church being raptured before the the antichrist is revealed requires you to ignore II Thessalonians verses 3 and 4. These verses clearly state that the man of sin is revealed sitting in the temple of God before the day of Christ. The reference to II Thessalonians 2:5-6, when taken in context, not only does not support a pre-tribulation rapture, it shows a pre-tribulation rapture is not possible.

Have we covered all the verses used to "prove" a pre-tribulation rapture? I'm afraid not:

LUK 21:34-36 *And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.*

I have included verses 34 and 35 to provide the proper context for verse 36. Here a timeline presentation is not as helpful. Verse 36 is quoted to indicate the escape of the things that come to pass. That escape is supposed to be the rapture. The problem is that verses 34 and 35 give a completely different picture to this meaning for verse 36. In verse 34 we are told to be careful of ourselves, or we might forget to watch for the coming day because we are too busy surfeiting (eating) and drinking, or that we may become depressed with the day to day worries of this life. We should keep watch or the day will surprise us. Verse 35 tells us that "that day" will come upon all who live on the planet earth. ALL!

Verse 36 says to be watchful and pray, so that we will be aware of the events enough so as to avoid the things that will occur, and be able to stand worthy before Jesus. How do we escape? In a rapture, or in like type to the children of Israel when God sent plagues upon Egypt. They went through the tribulations of the day but were unharmed because they were deemed worthy to escape the judgments brought upon Egypt. We are likewise told many times to comfort and strengthen one another with these words. Why would we need to comfort and strengthen unless we will be here.

Another verse quoted is **TIT 2:13**: *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

Again, I add the verses around the referenced one to look at the context. This verse does indeed speak of Jesus return, but it doesn't provide any idea of when to expect this event. It simply tells us we should always be looking with joyful anticipation so that we no longer are tempted by ungodliness and worldly lusts. By now you are probably saying: so, why tell me this? Why do you take up a discussion that will probably only be answered when the event occurs? Let me explain my reason for writing this booklet.

Many good Christian pastors, evangelists, and teachers teach the pre-tribulation rapture as fact, not just as one of several opinions. Many have been taught it as a fact themselves and believe it to be so. I myself was also taught it as fact and for many years believed it. Many logical reasons and theories, based on a number of assumptions were provided to support the pre-tribulation rapture. None were totally based on scripture and so, I was never quite sure. I said that as long as I could find no scriptures that told me for sure when it was, that I would believe in a pre-tribulation rapture. Some time ago I read some scriptures nobody had ever quoted regarding the rapture and they were clear and they were specific about when this event was to be.

But what really concerns me is that some pastors and teachers may not believe in a pre-tribulation rapture, yet feel they must teach it anyway. This may be so, because some of them may believe that if they teach their church members they will go through the tribulation, many members will be offended, possibly placing his job in jeopardy.

But I believe that the doctrine of pre-tribulation rapture is the strong delusion to be sent according to **2TH 2:11**. If you believe in the pre-tribulation rapture, you are not preparing to withstand the tribulation challenges. You're preparing for a trip! A trip away from all the troubles of the times. The Jews must face this time alone. Anyone else can escape by being saved before the tribulation begins. Since the only sign that occurs at the beginning tribulation is a peace treaty in Israel, the first time you will have any real evidence that the tribulation has begun is when the Abomination of Desolation stands in the Holy place. If you are here on that day, will you have kept yourself from the snares of the Devil? Or will you also begin to wonder the question:

2PE 3:3-4: *Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.*

Look at this text. Some say this refers to scoffers about the coming of the Lord to reign. I believe this is the attitude of scoffers and weak believers who have been waiting for the pre-tribulation rapture when they realize the Abomination of Desolation has been revealed. They will turn to their teachers and perhaps even their pastors and ask: Where is the promised pre-tribulation rapture or literally the coming of Christ for his church?

Won't you please consider these quotes and search the scriptures yourself. Read the verses and check the context of the verses. Ask God to show you is true concerning this subject. There are scriptures that tell us to comfort and strengthen each other with these words. As the children of Israel were told to be strengthened and see the hand of the Lord at work in Egypt. We too are to remind each other that God will deliver us from the plagues coming upon the earth. Will you be ready? Will you have made proper plans? Will your name be found in the book?

Think about it!