

The Return

Eschatology

A study of the end of times

Return Church

Wednesday evening

Bible study

March 11, 2026

Lesson #4

The Return

1. The Coming Kingdom
2. The Millennium Reign of Jesus Christ
3. The Mysteries of the Kingdom
4. **The Rapture of the Church**
5. The 2nd coming of Jesus Christ
6. Signs of the times
7. The Tribulation Period
8. The End of time, into Eternity

The Rapture of the Church

Also called the Gathering or the 1st Resurrection



Premillennialism

- While we respect those with amillennial or post-millennial views, it is our position and belief in a premillennial view and that is what we teach.
 - Jesus returns physically to earth *before* the 1,000-year period begins. After He returns, He establishes a literal, earthly kingdom and reigns from Jerusalem for 1,000 years. Satan is bound in the pit and the world experiences peace, justice and prosperity. However, there are two branches or views to this system of thought.
1. **Historic Premillennialism** – Held by most early church fathers. (this is the older view.) The church goes through the tribulation. There is no secret pre-tribulation rapture.
 2. **Dispensational Premillennialism** –This doctrine is the modern view, it began in 1830 by John Nelson Darby. Includes a secret rapture of the church before the tribulation period.

The Rapture

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be **caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. ***1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 NKJV***

- This is the most famous scripture referring to the rapture.
- **Caught up** – Harpazo, Greek, caught up by force. (The word rapture is not in the Bible.)
- There is no debate whether this will happen or not, the question at hand is when it will happen.
- One view believes this will happen before the tribulation period.
- The other view believes it will happen at the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ, or at the end of the tribulation period.

Instantaneous

Behold, I tell 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 trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. ***1 Corinthians 15:51-52 NKJV***

- This is the 2nd most famous rapture scripture.
- It will happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.
- Both views believe this will happen. It just a matter of when.
- Does this happen at the rapture or the 2nd coming?
- I'm dogmatic that the rapture will happen, but I am simply not dogmatic about when it will happen.

Rapture or 2nd coming?

Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. **John 14:1-3 NLT**

Both views believe this.

The Rapture or the 2nd Coming?

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah *were*, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two *men* will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two *women will be* grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. ***Matthew 24:36-44 NKJV***

The trumpet

Rapture or 2nd Coming?

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with **the trumpet** of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ***1 Thessalonians 4:16 NKJV***

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the **last trumpet**. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. ***1 Corinthians 15:52 NKJV***

And He will send His angels with a great sound of **a trumpet**, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. ***Matthew 24:31 NKJV***

Derrick Prince

Only watchful, faithful, and prepared believers will be taken. Some believers could be left to go through tribulation as discipline or purification. The rapture is for those who are ready, not simply everyone who claims Christianity.



This is a comfort not a terror

- I have sat under teaching in my past that believed like Derrick Prince. That only the overcoming Christians will go up in the rapture. And the carnal, lukewarm, back-slidden or non-overcoming Christians will be left behind.
- I can find no scripture to support this theory. Only scriptures inferring this.
- It is my firm belief that all Christians will go up in the rapture, whether it takes place before or after the tribulation period.
- **The people that are in trouble are the people that think they are saved but are not.** (Wheat and tares, sheep and goats.)
- It is a mistake for believers to live in fear of missing the rapture. All true born-again Christians will go up in the rapture.
- The idea of a rapture should be a comfort and a hope, not a fear or a torment.

Pre-tribulation or Post-tribulation

- We all agree that this catching away will happen. The thing people disagree on is when will this happen.
 - **Pre-Trib:** Before the tribulation period. This is what I grew up believing as a Southern Baptist, and have believed for most of my adult life.
 - **Post-Trib:** At the end of the tribulation period. This is what most of early church fathers believed.
 - There is also a minority view called the Mid-Trib view. At the midway point of the tribulation period or 3 ½ years in. Many of these people only believe in a 3 ½ year tribulation period.
 - For the sake of this study, I will present the Dispensational Premillennial view first (**Pre-Trib**), then I will present the Historic Premillennial view (**Post-Trib**). It is your job to study your Bible, pray, and ask the Holy Spirit to teach you and show you the truth.

Pre-tribulation rapture view:

- Dispensational premillennialist believe that the rapture will happen before the tribulation period.
- This is a secret coming of Jesus Christ before the tribulation.
- I Thessalonians 4:16-17 describes believers being taken up, not Christ coming to judge the world. Jesus does not touch the earth here, unlike passages describing His second coming.
- He comes in the clouds at the rapture, and His feet touch the earth in the 2nd coming.
- At the Rapture Christ comes for His Saints, but at the 2nd coming Christ comes with His Saints.
- At the rapture, He comes rescuing the church, at the 2nd coming He comes rescuing Israel.

Believers are spared from God's wrath

And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *even* Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 NKJV

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ***1 Thessalonians 5:9 NIV***

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. ***Romans 5:9 NKJV***

The wrath of the Lamb

And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand? ***Revelation 6:15-17 NKJV***

- This is probably their best argument.
- The rapture is God sparing the Church from the coming tribulation period where the wrath of God is poured out. Jesus comes and rescues us from the wrath to come.

The church of Philadelphia

Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. ***Revelation 3:10 NKJV***

- People that believe in a pre-tribulation rapture, believe that this is speaking of the church at the time of the rapture.
- The Philadelphia church is commonly believed to be the church that gets raptured out of this world before the hour of trial.

Church is not present during tribulation

- People with a Pre-tribulation view, believe the church will not be present in the tribulation period.
- The word **church** appears frequently in Revelation chapters 1-3, but it is absent from Revelation in chapters 4-18. They argue that **the church** missing during the tribulation period?
- The tribulation is a period of God's wrath poured out upon the earth, why would the church have to go through that?

Imminent

Most pre-tribulation people believe the rapture is imminent, meaning that it could come at any time now. There are no more signs to be fulfilled. It could happen tonight.

Comfort and hope

Pre-tribulation people argue that a post-tribulation view doesn't produce much hope or comfort. It gives us hope and comfort to think that we will not have to go through the great tribulation period.

Therefore **comfort** one another with these words. ***1 Thessalonians 4:18 NKJV***

Looking for the **blessed hope** and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. ***Titus 2:13 NKJV***

The restrainer is removed

And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, ***II Thessalonians 2:6-8 NKJV***

Most people with a pre-tribulation view people believe the restrainer is the Holy Spirit indwelling the church. When the church is raptured, the restraint is lifted, then the tribulation can begin. The Anti-Christ can't come to power until the restrainer is removed.

A departing first

Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the **falling away** comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ***II Thessalonians 2:3 NKJV***

Pre-trib people like the Geneva Bible translation here.

Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a **departing first**, and that that man of sin be disclosed, *even* the son of perdition. ***II Thessalonians 2:3 - 1599 Geneva Bible***



John Nelson Darby

The Church will be removed from the earth before the judgments of the Apocalypse begin.

A modern idea

- A pre-tribulation rapture is relatively a new idea.
- John Nelson Darby, the leader of The Brethren movement, first wrote about this in 1830.
- This spread rapidly in the USA mainly via:
- In 1909 the Scofield Reference Bible put Darby's notes in the margins. Millions of Christians assumed it was historic doctrine.
- Hal Lindsey wrote the book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*. (1970)
- "The next event of God's timetable is the rapture of the Church." *Hal Lindsey*
- Tim LaHaye wrote the **Left Behind** novels that sold 65 million copies.

A few old quotes

- However, I did find a few very old quotes from:
- **The Shepherd of Hermas AD 150.**
- **Cyprian AD 250.**
- These quotes implied a pre-tribulation rapture, but I also had other research that disagreed with this.
- It is possible that a few very early church fathers believed in and wrote about a pre-tribulation rapture, but this is debated.
- Without access to their original writings, I simply cannot confirm this.

D.L. Moody

**“Christ may come
at any moment.”**





David Jeremiah

Without any sign, without any warning, Jesus Christ could come back to this earth and take all of his followers to heaven with him.

The Rapture is God's protection of His saints from the Tribulation—the seven years of judgment that will be poured out on earth after His children ascend to heaven.



John Hagee

The rapture is what we call the event in which Jesus comes again to take believers out of this world. Believers in Jesus Christ are taken in the rapture; unbelievers will be left behind.

The rapture is no more escapism from the world than salvation is escapism from sin.



Jimmy Swaggart

The Rapture is the next great event on the horizon of time (perhaps the greatest in all of history.)

That the signs indicate the time is short and the event could happen at any moment.



Charles Stanley

Believers should live with purpose, expectancy, and anticipation of His return. Jesus could return at any moment.

The Rapture is the moment believers are taken to be with the Lord, freeing them from the wrath to come and bringing them into the full, eternal rewards promised to the church.

Are we too comfortable in this world?

- Reading about the tribulation period in the book of Revelation scares a lot of people.
- Christians are being persecuted, tortured, and many are dying martyr's deaths.
- But to these Christians, the vision of a conquering King was the ultimate comfort to them. Their hope to spend eternity with Jesus was far greater than their fear of suffering persecution.
- If Revelation looks like a horror story to us, maybe it's because we are too comfortable in this world. We are to be strangers and pilgrims in this world.
- **I hope I have given a fair argument in favor of a pre-tribulation view.**
- And I hope that the pre-tribulation view is the correct view. I don't want to have to go through the tribulation period and I certainly don't want my family and loved ones to suffer such pain.
- It would be a lot simpler and a lot more popular for me to just teach a pre-tribulation view, but as a pastor that loves you, my convictions will not allow me to do that. I believe it is very important that you see the other view.

None of these men believed in a pre-tribulation rapture.

- Martin Luther
- John Calvin
- John Wesley
- Charles Spurgeon
- A.W. Tozer
- Jonathon Edwards
- George Muller
- George Whitefield
- C.S. Lewis
- Oswald Chambers
- Andrew Murry
- Charles Finney
- Tim Keller



George Muller

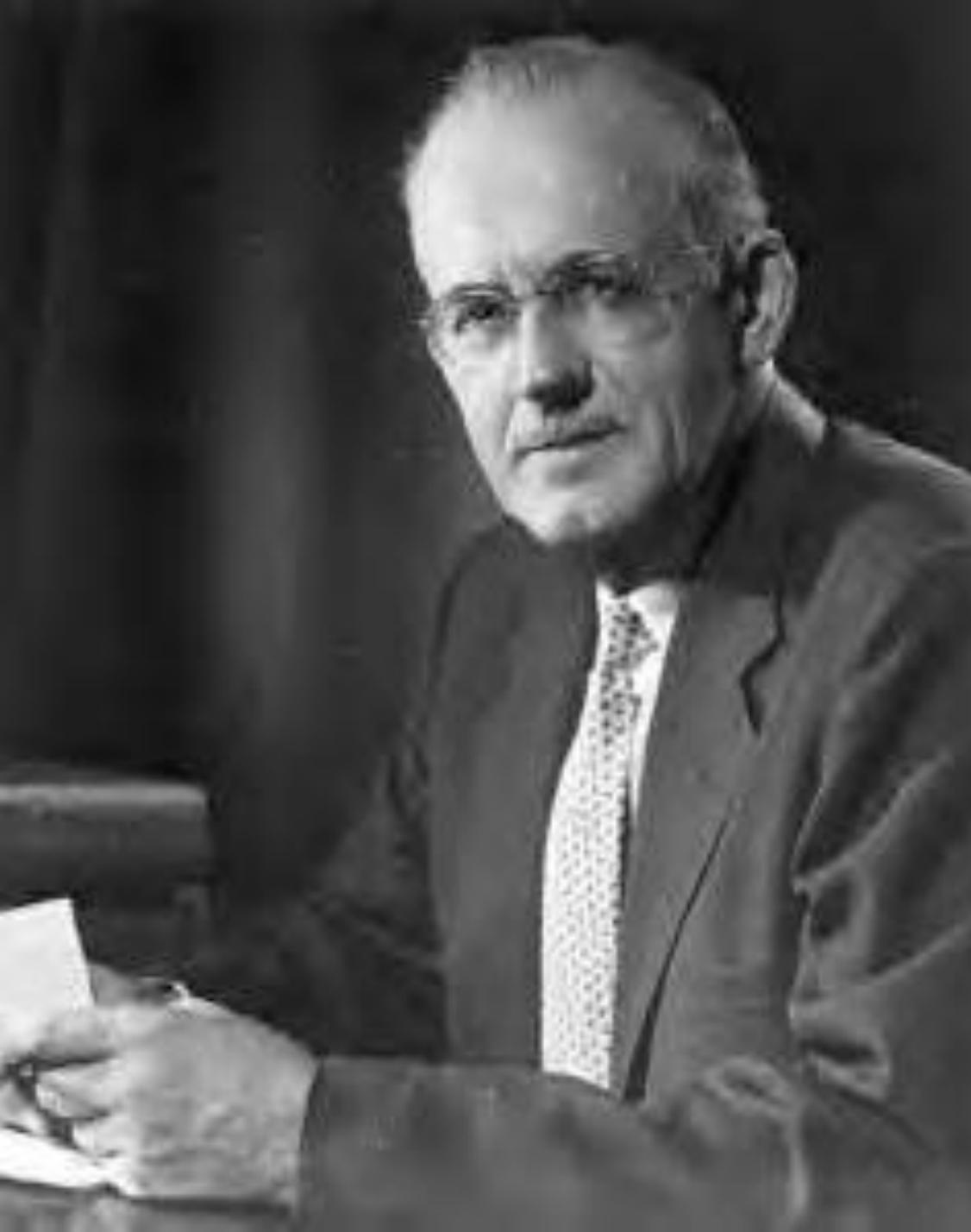
The Lord will come once, and the resurrection will occur at that time, not seven years earlier.



Charles Spurgeon

We are not looking for a secret rapture...Christ coming will be as visible as lightning across the sky.

The Church is to pass through great tribulation.



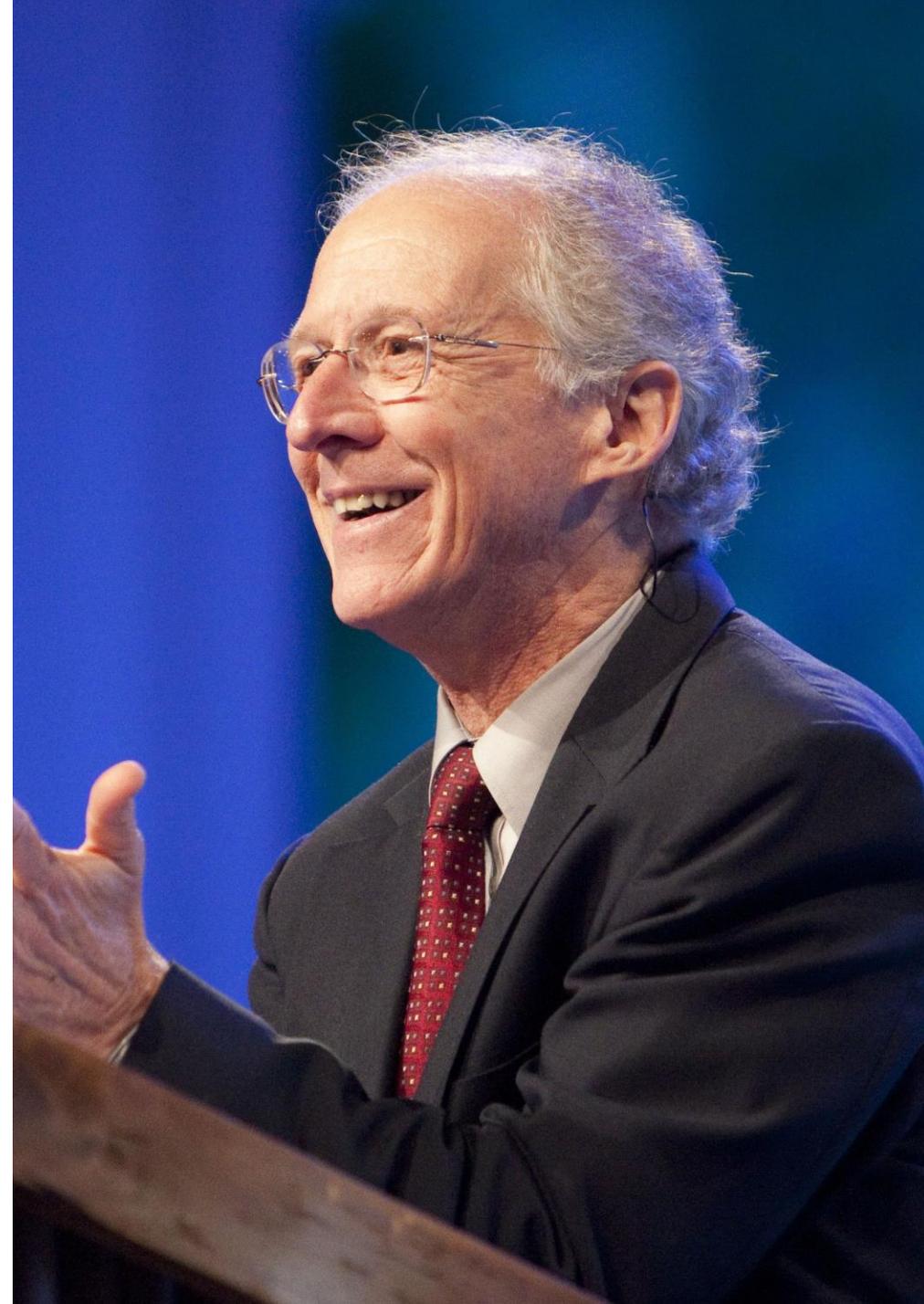
A.W. Tozer

**The teaching that
Christians will escape
the tribulation is a
comforting but
dangerous error.**

John Piper

The rapture refers to the rising of the church to meet the Lord Jesus in the air at His second coming.

The anticipation of a pre-tribulation rapture is an erroneous inference from the New Testament.



Corrie ten Boom

- She survived the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps.
- She helped many Jewish people escape from the Nazis during the Holocaust in World War II by hiding them in her home.
- She wrote the book, *The Hiding Place*.
- Corrie became so distraught over the effect of pre-tribulation teaching that she saw it as one of the things against which Jesus warned, a false teaching that would deceive many. Corrie saw herself as having a divine mandate to encourage people to be strong in Jesus in times of persecution.



There are some among us teaching there will be no tribulation, that the Christians will be able to escape all this. These are the false teachers that Jesus was warning us to expect in the latter days.

-Corrie Ten Boom

The 2nd Coming

And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. *1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 NKJV*

- The post-tribulation view believes that the rapture will take place at the end of the tribulation period or at the same time as the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ.
- They believe Paul is treating the rapture and the 2nd coming as the same event.

The 2nd coming

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our **gathering together to Him**, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. ***II Thessalonians 2:1-3 NKJV***

- There will be a falling away before Christ comes back.
- Anti-Christ has to be revealed before the Lord comes back to get us.
- If this is speaking of a pre-tribulation rapture, then it is not imminent, but there are more signs to be fulfilled.

The falling away

Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the **falling away** comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, // **Thessalonians 2:3 NKJV**

Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a departing first, and that that man of sin be disclosed, *even* the son of perdition. // **Thessalonians 2:3 - 1599 Geneva Bible**

Falling away – apostasia, (ap-so-tas-ee-ah), a falling away, defection, apostasy, to forsake.

(**ESV** rebellion, **AMP** apostacy, **KJV** falling away, **NASB** apostacy, **NIV** rebellion, **NLT** great rebellion, **Youngs** falling away.)

Tribulation – 2nd Coming – Gathering

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, 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. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. ***Matthew 24:29-31 NKJV***

- This is their best argument.
- Look at the order of events.
- Tribulation – 2nd Coming – Gathering.

This is the first resurrection

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. **This is the first resurrection.** *Revelation 20:4-5 NKJV*

- This happens after the tribulation period and after Anti-Christ is defeated.
- If believers were resurrected at a rapture before the tribulation period, this could not be the first resurrection.

The restrainer

And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, ***II Thessalonians 2:6-8 NKJV***

- The restrainer is never identified here.
- It couldn't be the Holy Spirit being removed from the earth.
- The Holy Spirit is obviously working on the earth during the tribulation period, because many people get saved during this time.
- It is impossible to get saved without the Holy Spirit.

The church in the tribulation period

- The pre-tribulation rapture people say that the word **church** appears frequently in Revelation 1-3, but it is absent from Revelation in 4-18. They argue that the church is missing during the tribulation period?
- The post-tribulation people say that the church is present during the tribulation period, because **Saints** are mentioned in the tribulation period. These Saints endure persecution and remain faithful.

It was granted to him to make war with the **saints** and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.

Revelation 13:7 NKJV

Saints in the tribulation period

Here is the patience of the **saints**; here *are* those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. ***Revelation 14:12 NKJV***

And he will speak against the Most High and wear down the **saints** of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be handed over to him for a time, times, and half a time. ***Daniel 7:25 NASB***

Not appointed to wrath

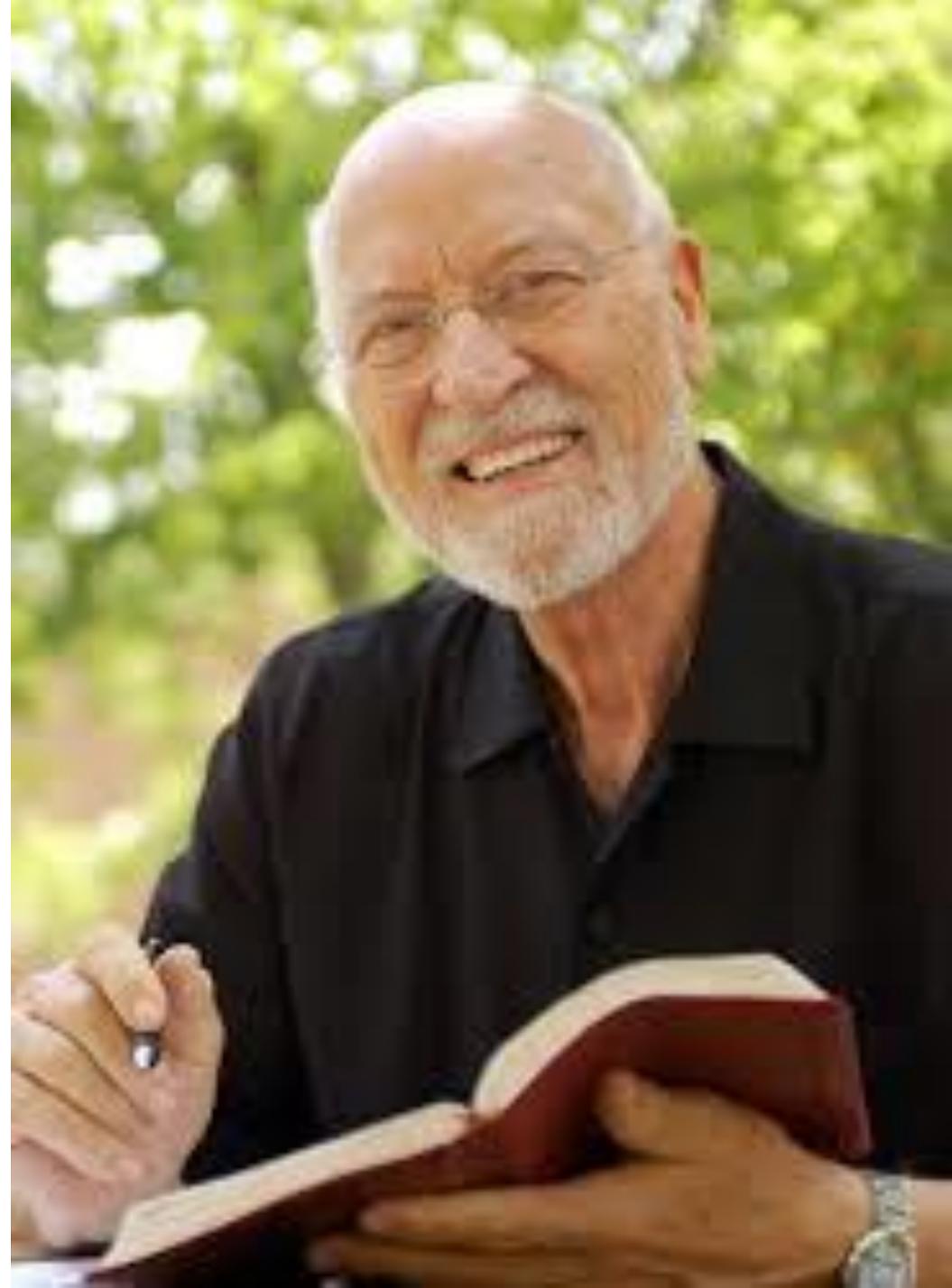
- The pre-tribulation view is that the rapture is God sparing the Church from the coming tribulation period where the wrath of God is poured out. Jesus comes and rescues us from the wrath to come.
- The post-tribulation view is that God can protect people while others are in the middle of judgment. Like Noah during the flood, and Israel while in Egypt during the plagues. God seals 144,000 during the tribulation.
- *Not appointed to wrath* (I Thess 5:9) doesn't mean earthly suffering but rather final judgment.
- The church has historically gone through much suffering and persecution.
- Much of the tribulation is Satan's wrath and not directly God's wrath.
- *Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, **Revelation 12:12 NKJV***

Post-tribulation rapture view

- **There is not one scripture in the Bible that says the church will be taken out of the world or raptured before the tribulation period.**
- All the verses about the rapture could mean that it takes place simultaneously with the 2nd coming of Jesus, and not a secret rapture before the tribulation period. The popular rapture scriptures say nothing about the timing relative to the tribulation period.
- The doctrine of a pretribulation rapture is an inference from several passages, all which are disputed. It is inference layered upon inference, not clear teaching. If this doctrine is so important, it is very strange that the Bible never clearly states it plainly.
- Matthew 24:29-31, Jesus says, Immediately after tribulation they will gather His elect. The elect here refers to the church and not Israel.

Don Finto

Many believe that the believers will be “taken away” before the tribulation period. I see many reasons for rejecting that theory and for the need to expend our energy preparing to weather the coming storms and shine most brilliantly during the world’s darkest hour.



Tribulation

- All of this disagreement is simply over when it will happen, not if it will happen.
- I hope and pray that the Pre-tribulation view is the correct view. I don't want to go through the tribulation period, nor do I want anyone that I love to have to go through such a time.
- The 3 ½ years of the Great Tribulation are going to be horrible, we will study a lesson on this tribulation period soon.
- But what if the pre-tribulation people are wrong? Maybe we should condition our hearts and minds to endure some suffering and persecution.
- In America we really don't know anything about suffering and being persecuted because of our faith. We are spoiled.
- Let's close this lesson looking at a few scriptures on tribulation.

He who endures to the end shall be saved

Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. **But he who endures to the end shall be saved. Matthew 24:9-13 NKJV**

Great Tribulation

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. **Matthew 24:21 NKJV**

A time of distress

Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands *guard* over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt. ***Daniel 12:1-2 NASB***

- **The tribulation period, then the resurrection.**

After the tribulation

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, 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. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and **they will gather together His elect** from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. ***Matthew 24:29-31 NKJV***

We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God. ***Acts 14:22 NKJV***

Tribulation

In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.
John 16:33 NASB

Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. //
Timothy 3:12 NKJV

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, ***1 Peter 4:12-13 NKJV***

Many *are* the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. ***Psalms 34:19 NKJV***

Maranatha – “O Lord come”

Maranatha! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. *1 Corinthians 16:22-23 NASB*

- Next week we will study the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ.
- We will look at the 10 big things that happen at His 2nd coming.
- Including the Battle of Armageddon.