

A CASE FOR THE PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE

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A CASE FOR THE PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE: INTRO AND PREMISE

The most exciting future event revealed in the Bible is the return of Jesus Christ. It is also one of the most controversial, contested, and disputed ideas discussed among Evangelical and Fundamentalist Christian believers, pastors and scholars. Astoundingly, it is also one of the most misunderstood and ignored doctrines within what is called the mainstream Protestant church, as well as the Catholic and Orthodox Christian churches, often receiving little to no attention at all. For much of the unbelieving world the thought of Armageddon, or particularly millions of people instantaneously disappearing from Planet Earth is a frightening consideration, like a scene from a science fiction movie. Yet, the Bible talks about it. In fact, it is based on one of Jesus' most familiar promises to His disciples:

Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also (Jn. 14:1-3).

For the follower of Jesus, he or she understands that Jesus has already fulfilled the first part of His promise—He has ascended into Heaven to the Father, to His “Father's house.” And in plain language he assured them and us, “if it were not so, I would have told you.” Thus we can take comfort and not be troubled or anxious in life. Rather, we can be confident that His word is sure, and we are to trust Him in the same way we trust in God, for verily He is God.

Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, has gone to prepare a place for us. The thought of that is profound, and personal: we belong somewhere, beyond this world. God is making a special place for us in His own dwelling. Messiah has also promised to return for us, and to take us *there*. Thus it is certain Jesus will come: when and how that will happen will be the topic of discussion for this paper.

The Millennium: Pre, Post, or A

When addressing the return of Jesus Christ there are a few distinctions that need to be understood. First, is everything the Bible says about Christ's Second Coming culminated in one single event, or are there two aspects of His coming, separated by a period of time? We will answer that later. Second, the Second Coming must be understood in the greater context relative to what the Bible refers to as the one thousand year reign of Christ, or the Millennium: "and they came to life [believers resurrected] and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4).

The Pre-tribulational (pre-trib) Rapture position operates within the *pre-millennial* view, therefore, we will address what are called the *amillennial* and *post-millennial* positions first. Also, there are the *mid-tribulational* and well as what is called the *pre-wrath* Rapture viewpoints that we will touch on briefly, and demonstrate how they too fail to support a comprehensive, overall understanding of the Millennium, the Rapture and Second Coming.

Amillennialism

In the Greek language a word is negated by placing the letter "a" before it; thus the word *amillennial* literally means "no millennium." The foundational problem with this view is its basis for interpreting Scripture, or its *hermeneutic*. The normal method of interpretation is the *literal-historical-grammatical method*, which allows the text to speak from its own authority.

Amillennialism relies on an allegorical, *non-literal* method in order to spiritualize the text, which places the authority in the mind of the interpreter, rather than in the text: as Paul Benware warns, "when one spiritualizes the Scriptures the interpreter becomes the final authority instead of the Scripture itself."¹ The implications should be obvious, yet a majority of Christendom has adapted the allegorical, non-literal approach from Origen and Augustine to today, influencing not only

¹ Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1995, 2006), 129.

eschatology (the study of “last things” or “end times”), but ecclesiology (study of the church), and has facilitated the teaching that the Church has replaced national, ethnic Israel, i.e., *Replacement Theology*. The ramification of this teaching has been responsible in part for “Christian” anti-Semitism through the centuries, which is a shameful and tragic part of the Church’s history. Further, and critically important is the fact that this method of exegesis cannot be used to explain and support other areas of theology such as Christ’s deity, or His atoning death and resurrection: i.e., “Did Jesus rise from the dead bodily literally, or allegorically?”

The main tenants of amillennialism are 1) most of the prophecies in Revelation as well as the *Tanakh*² (Old Testament) and the New Testament have already been fulfilled with the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple in AD 70. Thus, 2) we are in the millennium *now*; 3) Satan is bound *now* (see Rev. 20:2-3)—which looking at world events today doesn’t appear to be the case—and 4) although the Bible clearly uses the number “a thousand years,” it really doesn’t mean a thousand years. What it does mean is anybody’s guess.

Paul Benware addresses the use of numbers in the Bible especially in this context: “The most basic function of numbers is to designate the quantity of something...a number is, and always has been, by its very nature literal...so the evidence is that the one thousand years of Revelation 20 are to be taken in the normal quantitative way.”³ Thus Benware concludes, “amillennialism fails to meet the demands of solid exegesis and is forced to avoid the natural rendering of the text. The spiritualization of prophecy provides a suspect foundation on which to build a system.”⁴

² “Tanakh” is from an acrostic based on the three Hebrew letters (ת=T, נ=N, כ=K) which begin the Hebrew words for Torah, Prophets, and the Writings.

³ Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach*, 133.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

Post-Millennialism

There are several similarities that the post-millennial shares with amillennialism, namely, the non-literal interpretation of Scripture, particularly Revelation 20. The weak premise for this has been established so we will not repeat it. The difference though is that amillennialism teaches that Christ will not return to Earth bodily, but is reigning on earth through the Church now. Whereas post-millennialism teaches that Jesus will return at the end of the age, effect all the resurrections and judgments at one event or at the same general time. Here again, the one thousand year reign is not taken literally, but is arbitrary, and not supported by sound rules of exegesis.

Thus we can fairly conclude that amillennialism and post-millennialism are on shaky ground, and now assert that the pre-Millennial view is the only viable option: the coming of Messiah for the Church shall precede the Millennium. We shall also see that it is logically impossible to place all of the end-time events of Christ's coming into one single episode, and how the mid-trib and pre-wrath views fail to be consistent with the whole of Scripture.

A Resurrection Mystery

In discussing the idea of a special *rapture* as distinct from a general resurrection, a few observations need to be made. The word *rapture* comes from 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be *caught up* together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

The Greek word for “caught up” is *harpazo* (ἁρπάζω), which means “to take something forcefully... with the thought of speed.”⁵

⁵ Bromiley Kittle and Friedrich, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), Logos Bible Software.

Translated from Greek to Latin (Jerome, AD 405) gives us the word *rapio* (or *rapturo* in verse 17, also used in Acts 8:39, and 1 Cor. 12:2), which means “to seize or snatch in relation to an ecstasy of spirit.” In English we get “rapture.” So, with the idea of being caught up with great joy, consider Paul’s letter to the Corinthians on this topic:

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will 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 imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:51–53).

Here Paul refers to a “mystery” in the context of the resurrection; therefore he cannot be referring to the general resurrection of believers or unbelievers. To a Messianic Jew with a background in Orthodox Judaism and Pharisaism, Paul was well acquainted with the idea of the resurrection. It is revealed in Daniel 12:2 and Job 19:25-26, and in John 11, Martha, the sister of the deceased Lazarus, said to Jesus, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day” (v. 24). Thus the “mystery” Paul is about to reveal cannot be simply the resurrection, but a special aspect of the resurrection, specifically regarding those who are alive on Earth at the time of Messiah’s return: “we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.” This corresponds to probably the most comprehensive passage on this event from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

First, notice that those who have “fallen asleep in Jesus” are *with Him*, not asleep *in the ground*, although their physical bodies are. When He comes He will bring them with Him to be

reunited with their physical bodies—“the dead in Christ will rise first.” After that, ‘in the twinkling of an eye’, “*Then* we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord” (v. 17).⁶

Notice *where* we will be ‘caught up to meet the Lord’: “in the clouds,” and “in the air.” We will not be on Planet Earth when we meet Him, but he will “catch us away” from this world, presumably as he promised, to take us to His Father’s house: “I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also” (Jn. 14:3, cf. 2 Thes. 2:1).

In the next section we will address the issue of pre, mid, post, and pre-wrath rapture, as well as “the trumpet.” I shall focus on the pre-trib position, and demonstrate that this is the only view consistent with all of Scripture, rendering the other views necessarily excluded as unviable.

Arguments against a Pre-Trib Rapture

One of the more common arguments against a Pre-Trib Rapture is the claim that it is a modern invention from John Nelson Darby in the 1830s, and that the early church never taught this. This is a logical fallacy (*argumentum ab annis—because it is old*) which seeks to refute something based on its age, but here it is a reversed application—because it is recent.

The fact is, different truths were recognized and doctrines were developed and accepted by the church at different points in history, such as the triune nature of God (Nicea, AD 325), the canon of Scripture (Hippo, AD 393; Carthage AD 397), as J. Dwight Pentecost explains:

Each era of church history has been occupied with a particular doctrinal controversy, which has become the object of discussion, revision and formulation, until there was general acceptance of what Scripture taught. The entire field of theology was thus formulated through the ages. It was not until the last century

⁶ One question often asked is “Why do people have to be reunited with their bodies?” The answer is that when God created man He created man from the dust of the ground and man became a living being when God breathed the breath of life into him (Gen. 2:7). Thus, man is not just a spirit being with a body, but the body is an integral part of the whole man—we are incomplete as human beings without our bodies. God’s will is to redeem the entire person—body, soul and spirit—which is one reason Messiah suffered physically as well as spiritually in that “He Himself bore our sins *in His body* on the cross” (1 Peter 2:24a).

that the field of Eschatology became a matter to which the mind of the church was turned.⁷

Thus we do not hold to a doctrine because of its age or even a church council, but because of what the Bible itself says. It is proven that Darby did not manufacture the idea, for as early as 1687 Peter Jerieu taught the Christ would come in the air and rapture his people and return to heaven before the battle of Armageddon. Also, in “Philip Doddridge’s commentary on the New Testament (1738) and John Gill’s commentary on the NT (1748) both use the term rapture and speak of it as imminent.”⁸ This imminence is what we will look at next.

The Imminent Return

The critical factor establishing the pre-trib view while refuting the others is the issue of the immanency of Christ’s coming at the Rapture. “The imminent coming of Jesus Christ means that there are no signs or events that must take place prior to His return. He could return at any moment.”⁹ This idea is communicated by Paul himself in his letters to the Corinthians and the believers at Thessalonica, where in both cases he uses the pronoun “we” rather than “you” or “they”, thus including himself in the possibility that he would also be a participant to this dramatic event: “Behold, I tell you a mystery; *we* will not all sleep, but *we* will 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 imperishable, and *we* will be changed” (1 Cor. 15:51-52). This same idea is conveyed to the Thessalonians: “*we* who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede *those* who have fallen asleep...the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then *we* who are alive and remain will be caught up together with *them* in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air”

⁷ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids, MI: Dunham, 1964), 166.

⁸ Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach*, 247.

⁹ *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 226.

(1 Thes. 4:15-17). Although it was later revealed to Paul that his own time on earth was short (see 2 Tim. 4:6-8), when he wrote *these* letters to Corinth and Thessalonica he included *himself* as a possible participant to the event we call the rapture, by recognizing the imminence of his Lord's coming.

This is the consistent teaching from the gospels, epistles, and Revelation, that Christ could come at any moment, indeed, "at such an hour as you think not the Son of Man cometh (Matt. 24:44). Yet the late Dr. R. C. Sproul, a prominent proponent of the amillennial view, derided the pre-trib view calling it a "curious doctrine"¹⁰ and even mocked the pre-trib view by saying,

The church will be caught up to meet Jesus, and Jesus will sort of come half-way back to the earth. He'll take up his saints out of the earth to meet him in the air, and He will stay with his saints...(pause)...aloft...(pause)...either for the seven years of the tribulation or however the schema is worked out.¹¹

Sproul further stated that "there is a lot of misinformation about this event, but this passage [1 Thes. 4:13-18] gives us some definite truths about it. Paul made it clear that Jesus' return will *not be secret* but will be visible"¹² (*emphasis mine*). Yet Paul writes that "the day of the Lord will come *like a thief in the night*" (1 Thes. 5:2), and Jesus Himself said, "Behold, I am coming like a thief" (Rev. 16:15).

The essence of this problem is similar to the dilemma the first century Jews had with the idea of two comings of Messiah: would he be a conquering king, or a suffering servant? The Scriptures indicated both. Like most people, they gravitated toward the more popular view of a

¹⁰ R.C.Sproul, The Rapture Question, Medium, accessed October 20, 2015, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/the-rapture-question/>.

¹¹ R.C. Sproul, The Last Days According to Jesus: A Teaching Series by Dr. R.C. Sproul, Medium, accessed October 20, 2015, http://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/last_days_according_to_jesus/the-rapture/.

¹² R.C. Sproul, What is the Rapture?, Medium, accessed October 20, 2015, <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-is-the-rapture/>.

conqueror—everybody loves a winner. Yet, rather than Messiah fulfilling *all* of the prophecies about his coming in one event, there were to be two events: first as a suffering servant (Messiah Son of Joseph), then later as a conquering king (Messiah Son of David). In the same way, one cannot compress everything the Bible says about the Second Coming and Rapture into one event.

Consider these verses regarding the imminent return of Jesus:

- Rev. 16:15, “Behold, I am coming like a thief.”
- 1 Thes. 5:2, “the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night”
- 2 Peter 3:10a, “the day of the Lord will come like a thief”
- Matt. 24:42–44, “Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. “For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think *He will.*”

The issue of the imminency of Christ’s return is well attested to from the apostles, and Jesus Himself. Recognizing there are disputes regarding trumpets, beasts, and other various symbols in the Scriptures, *imminency alone* sufficiently sets the pre-trib view apart from all the other viewpoints regarding *the timing* of the Rapture.

Consider this: is it really possible that after the rise of the Anti-Christ onto the world stage, or major global catastrophes where half the world’s population has been killed, after devastating supernatural judgments and events, or during the battle of Armageddon and nuclear holocausts, it is really conceivable that true believers could be caught by surprise, spiritually slumbering or sleeping, *not* expecting Jesus to return? I think not. Yet, this is what a mid or Post-Trib view requires: such a view is untenable.

The chart below compares and contrasts the differing views of the Rapture.

Rapture Chart

<i>Timing of Rapture</i>	<i>Covenants</i>	<i>Imminence</i>	<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Location of Church</i>	<i>Church/Israel</i>	<i>Second Coming</i>
*Pre-Trib	*Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants fulfilled in New Covenant	*Yes. Rapture precedes Tribulation	*Church Taken to Father's House	*In Heaven	*God works with national Israel during Tribulation	*Christ comes <i>with</i> saints. Rescues Israel
Mid-Trib/ Pre-Wrath	*Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants fulfilled in New Covenant	No. Rapture appx. 3½ year point of Tribulation	Church Taken to Father's House	On earth 1 st half of Tribulation	God works with Church & nat'l Israel during Tribulation	Christ comes <i>with</i> saints. Rescues Israel
Post-Trib	Abrahamic & Mosaic Covenants applied to Church, Israel rejected	No. Rapture at end age or end of 7 year tribulation	To return immediately w/ judgment on ungodly	On earth during entire Tribulation	Church is Israel. Jewish nation rejected	Christ comes <i>for</i> saints and His Kingdom
*1Th. 4:16-5:3; 2 Th. 2	*Jer. 31:31-34 Romans 11	*Rev 16:15 Matt. 4:42	*Jn. 14:1-3 Rev. 3:10	*Rev. 4:1 2 Co. 5:1-10	*Jer. 30:7; Rev. 7:4-8	*Rev. 19; Zec. 12-14

*Scriptures supporting Pre-tribulation Rapture view are indicated on bottom row. Other views (Mid-Trib/Pre-Wrath, Post-Trib) are general representations.

What about The Last Trumpet?

The question regarding the last trumpet from 1 Corinthians 15:51 is often used to support the Post-Trib view: “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.” Which trumpet is this ‘last trumpet’? There are seven trumpet judgments in Revelation (9:2-11:15), as well as other references to trumpets in the same book (1:10; 4:1). Often the reference is made to Revelation 11:15 as the last trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15. However, one must remember that at the time Paul wrote to the Corinthians, John would not receive and write the Revelation for another thirty or forty years, which would likely be a completely different generation. While it is possible that the Spirit of God could prophetically inspire Paul to write verse 51 for a future referent, Paul’s immediate audience in Corinth would have no way to interpret what it meant, which would not explain the very mystery he claimed to be revealing to them.

So, what is the last trumpet? The answer may be found in the mysterious, prophetic nature of the seven feasts that God gave to Israel in Leviticus 23. In the same letter to the Corinthians, Paul references Passover/Unleavened Bread, where he exhorts the Jewish and

Gentile believers to celebrate Passover in light of the New Covenant, “Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened, for Christ [Messiah] our Passover also has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7); also First Fruits fulfilled in the Resurrection:

“Now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

The Corinthians were apparently familiar with the feast days God gave to Israel, thus a quick overview of the feasts will be helpful for us here.

In Leviticus 23 God lays out seven annual feasts that Israel was to keep perpetually: Passover, Unleavened Bread, First fruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Yom Kippur, and Tabernacles. Many recognize these as a framework for God’s overall program for the redemption of Israel, and the world. In the New Covenant we recognize that four of seven have already been fulfilled:

- Passover, with the death of Messiah as the Passover Lamb without spot or blemish;
- Unleavened Bread, with the sinless (unleavened) ‘Bread of Life’ placed in the ground;
- Firstfruits, with the resurrection of Messiah as ‘the firstfruits of the resurrection’;
- Pentecost, fifty days after Passover when God gave Israel the Law, fulfilled in the New Covenant by God giving Israel His Spirit.

Take special note that each of these feasts were fulfilled in the New Covenant on their *exact day*. This is no coincidence with a sovereign God. Is it presumptuous to expect that the remaining three feasts will also be fulfilled on their respective days? We shall let that question lie for now, since no man knows the day or the hour of Christ’s return. However, regarding the last trumpet, let us consider the next feast day on God’s prophetic calendar: The Feast of Trumpets.

There were several purposes for the trumpets to be sounded: a call to assembly or announcement, a call to mobilize, to war, or to judgment, and a call to worship and celebration.¹³

¹³ Sam Nadler, *Messiah in the Feasts of Israel: God’s Appointed Times in History and Prophecy* (Charlotte, NC: Word of Messiah Ministries, 2002), 95.

In light of the overall prophetic scenario revealed for the last days, all of these purposes are fulfilled at the sounding of the trumpet and Messiah's return: 1) He calls the assembly (*ekklesia*, or church) to mobilize and meet Him in the air; 2) the trumpet of war and judgment is sounded for the last battle between God and Satan revealed in Revelation 4 through 19; and 3) the trumpet of celebration and worship, as we will be reunited with loved ones and worship God as never before when we see Him face to face!

Also, bear in mind that at Pentecost, the giving of the Law was introduced with a series of trumpet blasts (see Ex. 19) similar to the Feast of Trumpets. Thus we see that the Feasts of Pentecost and Trumpets serve the church age as bookends—initiated and consummated with trumpet blasts, with a season of harvest between them (see Lev. 23:22). This idea the Corinthians would very likely have understood. It is also important to realize that during the Feast of Trumpets (known today as Rosh Hashana) there was not only one trumpet blast, but an entire series of trumpet blasts. It may well be that it is not just the literal final trumpet blast at Rosh Hashana that we are anticipating, but the last one at the moment of the Rapture that will matter to the believing remnant at that time. That remains to be seen.

Additional Problems with the Post/Amillennial View

There are additional problems for the post- or amillennial perspective, specifically the repopulation of the Earth during the 1,000 year reign of Messiah. If all of the believers are “raptured” at the end of the Tribulation—and their ‘mortality puts on immortality’—so that God can destroy the wicked at Armageddon, where will the natural human beings come from who will live during this period, as Isaiah says:

²⁰ “No longer will there be in it an infant *who lives but a few days*,
Or an old man who does not live out his days;
For the youth will die at the age of one hundred
And the one who does not reach the age of one hundred
Will be *thought* accursed.

²¹ “They will build houses and inhabit *them*;
 They will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
²² “They will not build and another inhabit,
 They will not plant and another eat;
 For as the lifetime of a tree, *so will be* the days of My people,
 And My chosen ones will wear out the work of their hands.
²³ “They will not labor in vain, Or bear *children* for calamity;
 For they are the offspring of those blessed by the LORD,
 And their descendants with them.
 (Isaiah 65:20-23)

Regarding the issue of Jesus’ imminent return, time fails us to address His parables such as “the Ten Virgins” (Matt. 25:1-13), “The Fig Tree” (Mark 13:28-37), or the correlation of the days of Noah and Lot (Luke 17:26-37); yet in all of these illustrations, our readiness in light of His imminent coming is emphasized.

No Rapture equals a Great Falling Away?

A common objection to the Pre-Trib position is the argument, “What if Jesus doesn’t rapture us out of here? People will fall away from the faith.” The claim is that for people who are expecting Jesus to take us out of this world, what will they do when the Anti-Christ appears, and they are still standing on Planet Earth? They will lose their faith and fall away from the Lord. This argument assumes several things. First that truly born-again believers can actually fall away and be lost, which this author does believe to be Biblical, and secondly, the assumption that people will fall away simply because their eschatological understanding was askew. To clarify, 2 Thessalonians 2:3 says, “Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness [Anti-Christ] is revealed.” Notice that the apostasy—falling away from the faith—comes first, then Anti-Christ is revealed, not the other way around. And frankly, the falling away has been underway for centuries, and is intensifying and accelerating in our present days.

A contrary view, and far more plausible and frightening, is this: imagine that apostate “Christian” churches—those who have already rejected the authority of Scripture, deny the gospel and its essentials, i.e., the Deity of Messiah, His sacrificial atoning death and bodily resurrection—those churches who really do not know the Lord or His word (John 8:32), what will be their reaction when the Anti-Christ arrives on the global stage? Mind you, this man will not be obviously evil, but will seem to have all the answers to all the problems that plague mankind. He will also likely be accessible to every faith on earth, an amalgamation personality of sorts—the 5th Buddha for Buddhists, the 12th Imam for Muslims, the Messiah for the Jewish people, a fully self-realized divine-human for New Agers, secularist and even atheists, *and* ‘the Christ’ for ‘Christians’: a New Age guru type of ‘Christ’, a spiritually enlightened master, not actually Jesus of Nazareth with the scars of Calvary. For people who think they are Christians, they will likely be deceived into believing in Anti-Christ, following him and even worshipping him. Consider Paul’s warning to the Thessalonian believers:

Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God [yet to be rebuilt in Jerusalem], displaying himself as being God.

Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains [the Holy Spirit in the lives of Believers, ‘salt and light’] *will do so* until he is taken out of the way.

Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; *that is*, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness (2 Thes. 2:3–12).

Solemn words indeed. Imagine that scenario, rather than being dismayed that Jesus didn't come when you thought He would, the deceptive euphoria of thinking one has been privileged to remain and see this great global advance in human history, which would also explain the previous mass disappearance of people only days or weeks prior. To think that Anti-Christ, Satan incarnate, is actually one's savior is the most devastating scenario imaginable.

On a similar note, an additional consideration for a Pre-trib Rapture is this 'one-world scenario' under Anti-Christ that the Bible depicts. What could compel mankind to lay aside all of their hostilities and differences, at least temporarily, in order to come together in a sense of global unity? The effect that a sudden, mass disappearance of millions of people—in mid-stride, mid-sentence—would have, and the resulting chaos and terror is unimaginable. The late Dave Hunt gives this compelling argument:

Here at last would be something large enough and horrible enough to unite every warring faction on earth. The common terror shared by all of earth's inhabitants would unify them in a way that nothing else could. Conflicts between Muslims and Hindus in India, between Arabs and Jews in Israel, between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland... would suddenly have become meaningless. Any scenario for uniting the world must deal with one [1.7] billion Muslims whose allegiance to Allah commits them to ultimate Islamic supremacy as the major article of their faith... The Rapture, and the Rapture alone, would break down every barrier and unite the entire world.¹⁴

The Pre-trib Rapture will be the catalyst to unite an unbelieving world and propel Anti-Christ onto the world stage, setting in motion the final seven years of Daniel's prophecy (9:24-27) known as "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7), and the Great Tribulation (Mark 13:19; Rev. 7:14), culminating in the redemption of Israel at the return of Her Messiah (Rom. 11:26, Rev. 19:7-21, Zech. 12-14), Jesus of Nazareth.

¹⁴ Dave Hunt, *How Close Are We?: Compelling Evidence for the Soon Return of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1993), 225.

Conclusion

We have seen that the issue of the imminence of Christ's return is the dominant, indisputable factor establishing a pre-trib, pre-millennial Rapture of the Church, necessarily excluding the other views as irreconcilable to the whole of Scripture. We have also seen that the pre-trib Rapture is not a recent invention, but rooted and grounded in the Word of God. Finally, we see it hinted at from the days of Moses and revealed in the New Covenant: an integral part of God's redemptive program illustrated in His feasts, four of which are fulfilled, with the Feast of Trumpets next on the schedule. Thus we can rest assured that Jesus will keep His word and return for us, to take us to His Father's house just as He promised.

In the meantime, we have been instructed to "watch and pray", to 'go out into the hedges and highways and compel people to come in', and to 'flee the wrath to come.' The time is short, may we not be caught unawares, but may we ever be about our Father's business, living expectantly, awaiting our Lord's return for us. Even so, Maranatha!

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