

The Church of the Servant King

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Prophecy Series

(Proph20D_The Coming of the Lord_Lsn4)

The Timing of the Rapture Verses the 2nd Advent
(A Defense of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Position)

Pre-Tribulation Rapture Position

This is the position that is promoted by ***The Church of the Servant King***. The Body of Christ or the Church will be translated prior to the beginning of the 70th week of Daniel, the seven year period also referred to as the Tribulation).

It is important to acknowledge that there is no positive statement that the rapture will occur prior to, in the midst of, or at the end of the Tribulation period. If there were such a definitive statement, then there would be little to no room for debate. Since there is no definitive statement, we must rely upon the cumulative body of evidence provided by numerous arguments from Scripture – none of which provides singular proof.

There are many arguments in favor of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture position.¹ I will only present what I believe to be a few of the more compelling arguments (in no particular order) in support of a pre-Tribulation Rapture position.

Argument #1 – The entire seven year period of the Tribulation is clearly related to the dispensation of the Age of Israel. There are several points that must be considered.

- Daniel's prophecy in Daniel 9:24ff of seventy weeks or 490 years for Israel includes seven years which have yet to transpire (see earlier lesson in this series).²
- There is no point in human history where God allows two administrations or dispensations to run concurrently as would be required of any (pre-Millennial) position other than that of a pre-Tribulation Rapture.
 - There is no passage of Scripture that contextually is associated with the Kingdom program of the Age of Israel that speaks of a "rapture" of believers from this planet.
 - However, the events associated with the Tribulation period, including the 2nd Advent of Christ, are detailed in passages contextually related to Israel and/or the Kingdom program.
 - There are passages of Scripture that are contextually associated with the Church Age Body of Christ that do speak of a "rapture" of believers from this planet (1 Thess 4:13-18).
- There are logical difficulties associated with placing the Rapture during (or especially at the end of) the Tribulation period where it is associated with the 2nd Advent of Christ.
 - The 144,000 of the Twelve Tribes of Israel (Rev 7:1-8) and all of the saved from the Tribulation period (Rev 7:14) would be members of the Body of Christ.
 - The members of the Body of Christ would need to change their gospel to the gospel of the Kingdom, i.e. "the Kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 24:14).
 - If the Rapture (or part of it) occurs at the end of the Tribulation, then only the unsaved would remain upon the earth and they are destroyed by the brightness of Christ's coming (Matt 25:40-46 cf. Rev 19:11-16; Zech 14:1-4).

¹ For instance, Dwight Pentecost lists twenty-eight reasons in his *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Dunham Publishing Co., 1966), 193-218.

² See the analysis of Daniel 9:24ff in "Proph20B_The Coming of the Lord_Lsn2."

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- If this were to occur, no one would be left in their earthly bodies to be delivered into the millennial, Messianic Kingdom on earth.
 - Those returning with Christ at His 2nd Advent would all be in their resurrection bodies thus making the millennial, Messianic Kingdom synonymous with the Body of Christ.
 - The idea that the millennial, Messianic Kingdom would consist entirely of saints in their resurrection bodies is contrary to the fact that there will be a great rebellion against Christ that is led by Satan at the end of the 1000 years (Rev 20:7-9).
- **Conclusion to Argument #1** – Those who would place the Church, the Body of Christ, in the Tribulation must either deny the basic dispensational distinctions between Israel and the Body of Christ and/or teach that God executes two separate and distinct dispensational purposes concurrently. The entire seven year period of the Tribulation is clearly related to the dispensation of the Age of Israel, not the Body of Christ.

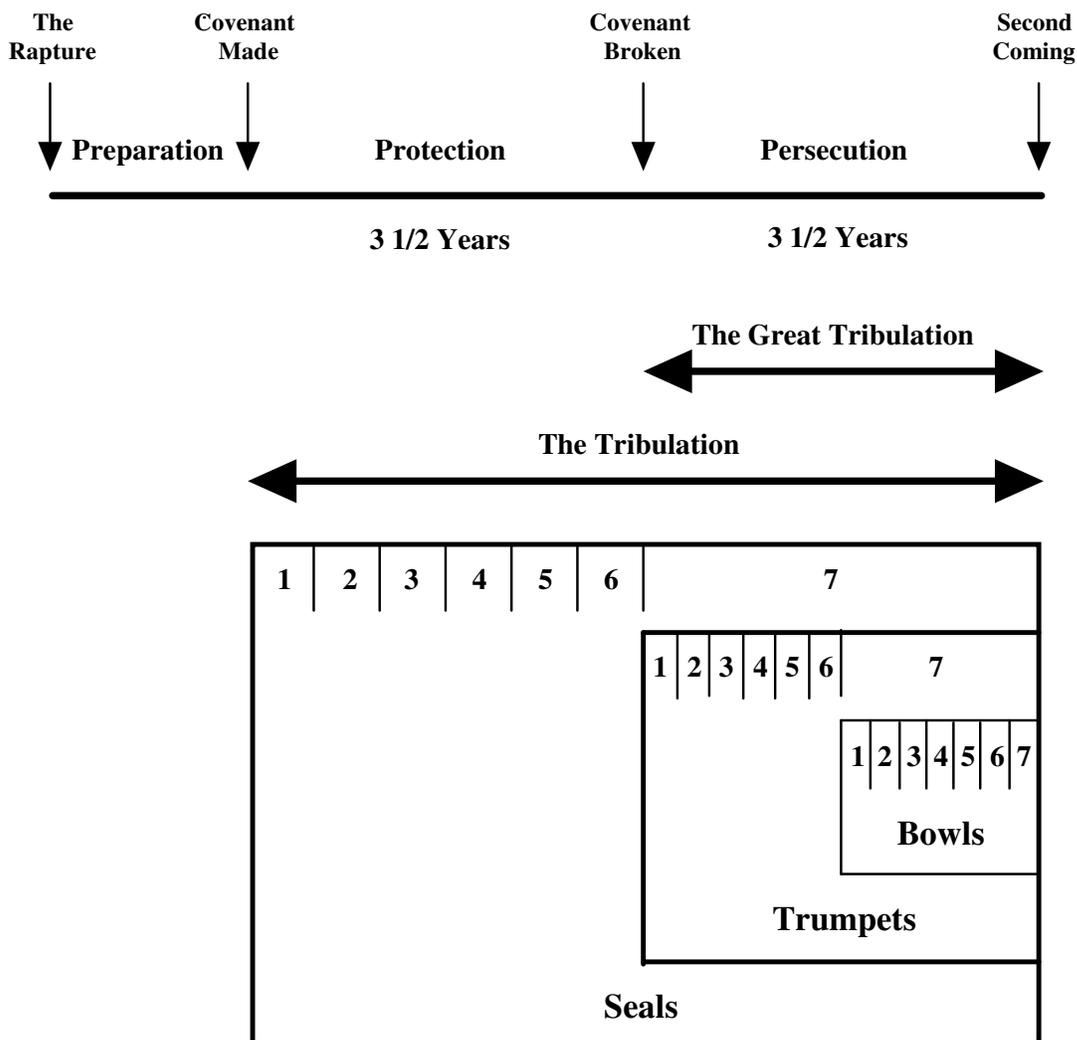
Argument #2 – (Corollary to Argument #1). There is nothing in the divine purpose of the Tribulation which concerns the Body of Christ. God's purpose in the Tribulation is twofold: **1)** to chasten the nation Israel in order that they might repent and receive the promised Messiah [Deut 30:1-3; Isa 54:7-17; 61:2, 3; Zech 12:10 cf. Jer 30:7 – “the time of Jacob's trouble”]; and **2)** Judge the unbelieving Gentile nations for their treatment of His chosen people [Isa 63:1-6; Ezek 38:14-23].

Argument #3 – (Corollary to Arguments #1 & #2) – Paul is very clear that the Body of Christ will be delivered from the wrath to come (1 Thess 1:9-10 cf. 1 Thess 5:1-9). The events that are to occur during this period of wrath necessitate a period of time for their fulfillment.

- The 70th Week of Daniel's prophecy begins in Revelation 5 & 6 where we are introduced to the four horsemen of the Apocalypse as the scroll containing seven seals is opened (Rev 5:1 – 6:17).
- The opening of the seventh seal (Rev 8:1) introduces the sounding of seven trumpet blasts that announce judgments upon the earth (Rev 8:1-11:19). The sounding of the seventh trumpet signals the second coming of Christ.
- The sounding of the seventh trumpet introduces the seven bowl or vial judgments (Rev 15:1 – 16:21).
- The following diagram presents a very viable interpretation of these judgments relative to the seven year tribulation period.³ Note the manner in which the 7th Seal introduces the trumpet and bowl judgments and how the 7th Trumpet judgment introduces the seven bowl judgments.
- During the Tribulation, both the wrath of God and the wrath of Satan will be displayed and given the time that must be required for these judgments to transpire, it is clear that they cannot occur in one day at the very end of the period.

³ Taken from Thomas Constable, “Notes on Revelation,” www.soniclight.com . The seven “seals” and the scroll are described in Revelation 5:1-6:17 & 8:1-6. The seven trumpets are described in 8:7-9:21 & 10:15-19. The “bowls” or “vials” are described in Revelation 16:1-21.

The Tribulation Judgments



Argument #4 – (Corollary to Arguments #1, #2, & #3) – Jesus’ instructions to His disciples anticipates persecution during the Tribulation, whereas Paul’s instructions to believers of the Body of Christ anticipate deliverance from the Tribulation. In Jesus’ teaching, He anticipated the continuance of the Age of Israel and the fulfillment of prophecy that was Israel-centric, i.e. the fulfillment of Daniel’s 70th Week, His 2nd Advent and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. In so doing, Jesus gave His disciples a great deal of information and instruction in regard to the persecutions that they could expect during the Tribulation period. He instructed them in regard to what they should do when they saw the “abomination of desolation” (Matt 24:15 cf. Dan 9:27) erected in the Temple. In the entire Olivet Discourse (Matt 24-25 & Lu 21), Jesus says nothing about a rapture of the disciples, rather He speaks of what they should do to avoid slaughter at the hands of “false christs” and “false prophets” (Matt 24:23-24). It seems rather strange that if Paul knew that the members of the Body of Christ were to experience the Tribulation, then he would have provided instruction in that regard. However, to the contrary, Paul never indicates that members of the Body of Christ will endure the Great Tribulation even though they will have “tribulations” on this earth (1 Thess 3:4).

As we have seen, adherents to the post-Tribulation theory have tried to read a “rapture” into Matthew 24:31; however, this passage is referencing a gathering of the believing elect of

Israel who have been dispersed during the periods of Gentile domination of Israel (a.k.a. the “times of the Gentiles” – Lu 21:24), but who will be re-gathered to the nation of Israel at the time of the Messiah’s 2nd Advent (cf. Deut 30:1-6; Isa 11:11, 12; 43:5, 6; 49:12; Jer 16:14-15; 29:14; Ezek 34:13; 36:24; 37:21-23).

Argument #5 – There are numerous other points to be considered which provide additional weight to the pre-Tribulation rapture view – most of which might be considered as additional support for one or more of the previous arguments.

- 1) Scripture teaches that the Church is not destined for wrath (1 Thess. 1:9-10) and will not be overtaken by the day of the Lord which includes the period of the Tribulation (1 Thess. 5:1-10). [See **Argument #3**]

9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.⁴ (1 Thess 4:9-10)

5:1 Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. 2 For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. 3 While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief; 5 for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; 6 so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. 7 For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. 8 But since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. 9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. (1 Thess 5:1-10)

Both of these passages are clearly set within the context of Paul’s addressing believer’s questions regarding the coming of the Lord and the resurrection of dead and living believers (see 1 Thess 4:13-18)

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may 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, shall 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 shall rise first. 17 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. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thess 4:13-18)

The strong implication from the context of 1 Thessalonians 4:13 to 5:11 is that the rapture precedes the “wrath.” In 4:15-17, believers are taken from the earth; whereas, the scene described in 5:1-11 involves sudden destruction and wrath in the earth.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

- 2) There is a clear distinction in the Scriptural descriptions of the two “comings” (*parousia*) of the Lord. This distinction is one involving people as well as circumstances. At the rapture – a gathering of the members of the Body of Christ to meet the Lord in the air in their resurrection bodies (1 Thess 4:17 cf. 2 Thess 2:1). At His 2nd Advent – a return to the earth at the end of the Tribulation period accompanied by his saints to reign with Him (Zech 14:1-4 cf. Matt 24:29-31, 36-44; 25:31-46; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 1:6; 19:11-16; 20:4-6).
- 3) Unless there is a distinction between the two returns, there would be no living people left to populate the Messianic kingdom. In some passages, it is the righteous who are taken (e.g. 1 Thess. 4:13-17). In other passages, it is the wicked who are taken (e.g. Matt. 25:40-41). This requires an interval between the two events. Otherwise, it would be necessary that the millennial reign of Christ (Rev 20:4-6) be a figure of speech or something other than a literal reign. It would also necessitate the spiritualizing of numerous passages that reference Israel’s restoration to a position of prominence among the nations (e.g. Psa 2; Isa 2:1-4; 9:6-7; Ezek 36:24). It would also necessitate the spiritualization of numerous passages that reference the kings of Gentile nations paying homage to the Messiah who will be reigning from Jerusalem (e.g. Isa 11:10-16; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1-5; 5:2-5).
- 4) Paul indicates that certain events must transpire before the Antichrist is revealed and prior to the Day of the Lord. For instance, the believers of Thessalonica were concerned that the Day of the Lord had come (2:2) and yet they had not been gathered together to Christ in connection with His *parousia* (2:1). [Obviously, this implies that the gathering together precedes the *parousia*, i.e. 2nd Advent]. Paul explains that the Day has not yet begun since certain events must come first that have not yet occurred. Therefore, they have not missed out on the rapture. Such a concern only makes sense if the rapture precedes the Day of the Lord (a phrase which can include any part of or all of the events from immediately after the rapture to the end of the Millennium).
- 5) One of the events that Paul describes that must precede the Day of the Lord is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-8. The restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2:6-8 is a reference to the Holy Spirit and His influence upon the world through believers. When the restrainer of the Antichrist is removed, then the Antichrist (“lawless one”) will be revealed. Some object to this being a reference to the Holy Spirit on the grounds that to *katechon* in 2 Thessalonians 2:6 is neuter (“what is holding back”). This is not a problem for two reasons: 1) the neuter is sometimes used of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14) and 2) in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 the words are masculine (*ho katechon*) that are translated “the one who restrains.” When the church leaves the earth in the Rapture, the Holy Spirit will be taken out of the way in the sense that His unique lawlessness-restraining ministry through God’s people will be removed.

A Summary of the Pre-Millennial, Pre-Tribulation Position

- 1) The Church is removed in its entirety (1 Thess 4:15-17).
- 2) The Church meets the Lord in the air and not on the earth (contrast 1 Thess. 4:17 with Matt. 25:31-34).
- 3) The Rapture is distinguished from the 2nd Advent because at the Rapture, believers receive incorruptible bodies (1 Cor 15:51-53); whereas at the 2nd Advent, believers enter the kingdom (Matt 24:40-42; 25:31-34).
- 4) Certain Scriptural distinctions are only resolved by means of a consistently applied dispensational hermeneutic. For instance, compare Matthew 25:13 (you don’t know the day nor the hour) to Revelation 12:6 (1260 days in the Great Tribulation) which provides the number of days between the erection of the statue of the Antichrist in the Temple at Jerusalem and Christ’s return. See also Daniel 9:27 (“middle of the week”); Matthew 24:15

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("the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet"); Daniel 7:25 ("a time, times, and half a time"); Revelation 12:14 ("a time, times, and half a time"); Revelation 11:2 ("forty-two months"); and Revelation 11:3 ("twelve hundred and sixty days").

- 5) Two dispensations have never co-existed simultaneously in history.
- 6) He (a reference to the Holy Spirit's indwelling of the believer and His restraining influence in the world through believers) must be taken away per 2 Thessalonians 2:7.
- 7) If the Rapture were to occur after the Tribulation, then why wouldn't the Church be the ones who are sealed to evangelize the world instead of the 144,000 Jews? (Rev 7:4ff)