

Rapture, Post-Tribulation View

What is Post-Tribulationism?

Post-tribulationism teaches that the Rapture and the Second Coming are facets of a single event that will occur at the end of the Tribulation when Christ returns. The church will be on earth during the Tribulation to experience the events of that period. It also teaches that the church, comprised of Jews or Gentiles, will go *through* this terrible period, but will be spared and will escape death. The rapture will take place sometime within the tribulation, or at the end. These church saints will go up in the clouds and almost instantly return with Christ to enjoy His kingdom reign.

Generally speaking, post-Tribulationists are content to attack other points of view rather than setting forth their own arguments. Actually the church is never found in any portion of Scripture dealing with the time of the tribulation, and the translation of the church is never mentioned in any passage picturing the return of Christ to set up His kingdom. Post-Tribulationism is built principally upon the identification of the church with Tribulation Saints, a conclusion which is without substantiation in Scripture. Post-Tribulationists cannot cite a single passage where this confusion is justified, and their arguments as a whole have been often refuted. For this reason most premillennialists have abandoned the post-Tribulation position as not being the hope for the Church taught in the Scriptures.

Post-Tribulationism Views

There are at least four distinct types of post-Tribulational views:

1. Classic post-tribulationism (J. Barton Payne, et al)
2. Semi-classic post-tribulationism (Alexander Reese)
3. Futuristic post-tribulationism (George E. Ladd)
4. Dispensational post-tribulationism (Robert H. Gundry)

Post-Tribulationism is not monolithic, but embraces many mutually contradictory views: amillennial post-Tribulation, post-Millennial post-Tribulation, premillennial post-Tribulational, and post-Tribulation views that equate the Rapture and the Second Coming. These differing views are based upon different approaches, presuppositions, and argumentation. In fact, they substantially contradict each other. As one insists on literalness, each of these views must embrace increasing difficulties.

Post-Tribulationalism teaches:

1. The church will be on earth during the Tribulation.
2. The Rapture and the Second Coming are facets of the same event at the end of the Tribulation.
3. The Tribulation Saints are the same as the Church saints.
4. Some teach, the wrath is not poured out until after the Tribulation, and the Church is raptured prior to this outpouring.
5. The Church and Israel are to be kept separate, but they are somehow put back together under the expression, "The people of God."
6. Imminence is no longer "the blessed hope."
7. Rapture passages are mingled with "watching and waiting" passages of Matthew 24-25.
8. Church believers can avoid "wrath" by living godly lives.
9. The day of the Lord as the Parousia and the rapture of the church.
10. Say Paul is telling believers to be watchful and sober for the coming of the Antichrist.

Major Rationale for the Post-Tribulation View

1. According to 1 Thess 4:16 and 1 Cor 15:52, the rapture will take place at the sounding of the last trumpet which, according to Matt 24:30-31, will take place upon Christ's return at the end of the Tribulation period.

The post-Tribulation view believes that this trumpet is described in Matt 24:30-31 and will be sounded upon Christ's bodily return at the end of the Tribulation.

Those who hold to a post-Tribulation rapture interpretation of this passage point to the similarities between the coming of Christ in Matt 24:30-31 and other rapture passages given by Paul, such as in 1 Thess 4:13-18 and 1 Cor 15:50-58. Examples of such similarities include Christ's coming in a cloud (Matt 24:30), the sounding of a trumpet, and the worldwide gathering of believers (Matt 24:31).

However, the trumpet of 1 Thess 4:16 and 1 Cor 15:52 is described much differently than the trumpet of Matt 24:30-31. While the trumpet of 1 Cor 15:52 will be sounded while Christ is in the process of returning to the earth from heaven (1 Thess 4:13-18), the trumpet of Matt 24:30-31 will be sounded after Christ has already returned to the earth. The trumpet of Matt 24:30-31 mentions Christ returning with His angels. The trumpet of 1 Cor 15:52 and 1 Thess 4:13-18 mentions only the trumpet call of an archangel. Upon the sounding of the trumpet in Matt 24:30-31, the angels will gather the elect. The trumpet of 1 Cor 15:52 and 1 Thess 4:13-18 does not mention the angels gathering the elect. In Matthew the Son of Man comes on the clouds, while in 1 Thess 4 the ascending believers are in them. In Matthew the angels gather the elect; in 1 Thess the Lord Himself gathers the believers. 1 Thess 4 only speaks of the voice of the archangel. In Matt 24 nothing is said

about a resurrection. In the two passages the *differences* in what will take place prior to the appearance of Christ is striking.

In order to equate Matt 24:30-31 with the Pauline rapture passages, a reconciliation of all of these differences is needed rather than merely highlighting a handful of similarities.

2. According to Rev 20:4-6, the resurrection of all believers will transpire at the end of the Tribulation period thereby necessitating that the rapture will also take place at this time.

The simplest response to this asserton is that the resurrection spoken of in these verses is speaking only of the resurrection of the Tribulation martyrs. Rev 20:4 clarifies exactly which resurrection is in view when it says, "And I saw *the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand*; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (italics added). Thus, Rev 20:4-6 is speaking of the believers who have died during the Tribulation, not those resurrected at the Rapture.

The superficial similarities that seemingly unite Paul's presentation of the rapture (1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:50-58) with Rev 20:4-6 are outweighed by their vast differences.

Although Rev 20:4-6 does speak of a resurrection of deceased saints, it says nothing about a translation and resurrection of living saints as Paul emphasizes in his discussion of the rapture. Rev 20:4 speaks only of a resurrection of the dead, not of a translation of living people, a truth that is prominent and a vital part of the other descriptions of the rapture in 1 Thess 4:13-18 and 1 Cor 15:51-58).

3. Although the church is exempted from God's wrath, the church will be on the earth during the entire Tribulation period because the Book of Revelation portrays God's people being supernaturally protected from many of the apocalyptic judgments during this time period.

While conceding that the church is exempted from God's wrath, the post-Tribulation view assumes that the church will still be on the earth during the Tribulation period while being exempted from many of the divine judgments. This assumption exists because of passages such as Rev 9:4: "They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but *only those who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads*." Rev 16:2 similarly says, "The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on *the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image*." Thus, according to the post-Tribulation view, just as God supernaturally protected the nation of Israel from the various plagues as recorded in the Book of Exodus (Ex 8:22; 9:4,6; 10:23; 11:7), God will do the same thing for His church in the midst of the Tribulation period.

While it is true that both Rev 9:4 and 16:2 teach that believers on earth during the Tribulation will be exempted from the fifth trumpet and the first bowl judgments, these believers do not refer to the Church. They instead refer to Tribulation Saints, who have been saved through the witness of the 144,000, et al. These are the only verses which specify that God's people will be spared from any Tribulation judgments. The implication is that believers will still experience the suffering described in the Book of Revelation. Thus, it is inaccurate to suggest that if the church is on the earth during the Tribulation period it will be spared from God's wrath.

If the Church is on the earth during the Tribulation, but divinely protected from God's wrath, then how can you explain the massive martyrdoms during this time period. The Book of Revelation consistently portrays the frequent martyrdoms that believers during the Tribulation will endure as a consequence of Christ opening the first seal judgment, which will usher in the diabolical reign of the Antichrist (Rev 6:1-2,9-11; 7:9,13-14; 13:15; 2 Thess 2:9-12).

Problems with the Post-Tribulation View

1. Who will populate the millennium? The Scripture teaches that some people, both believers and unbelievers, will survive the Great Tribulation (Matt 24:22).

These survivors will be gathered by Jesus upon His bodily return to the earth (Matt 24:30-31). What then follows will be the Sheep and Goat Judgment for the surviving Gentiles (Matt 25:31-46) as well as a parallel judgment in the wilderness for the surviving Jews (Ezek 20:34-44). The purpose of these judgments will be to ascertain which ones among the surviving mortals are in faith and which ones are in unbelief. Following these judgments, the surviving unbelievers will then immediately be cast off the earth into judgment or Hades while the surviving believers will enter the millennial kingdom (Ezek 20:34-38; Matt 25:34,41).

No resurrection or translation of these believers into resurrected bodies is described in these verses. Rather, these surviving believers will enter the millennial kingdom in their mortal bodies. They will repopulate the earth as they have children and their children have children (Rev 20:8). The fact that there will be mortals dwelling upon the earth during the earthly kingdom becomes especially apparent when the prophetic Scripture describes the many activities that the inhabitants of the millennial kingdom will participate in. These many activities are possible only for mortals in non-resurrected bodies rather than for those in a resurrected state. Examples include child- bearing (Is 65:20,23), labor (Is 65:21-23), death (Is 65:20), sin (Ezek 45:22), and even rebellion against God (Zech 14:16-19; Rev 20:7-9). By contrast, marriage and procreation (Is 65:20,23) are not possible for resurrected saints (Matt 22:30). Nor are those in resurrected bodies subject to death (Is

65:20) since they will have already put off mortality and are clothed with immortality (1 Cor 15:52-56).

The problem with the post-Tribulation view is that the church will be raptured immediately before the Second Coming of Christ at the end of the Tribulation period. At this event, all living believers will be given resurrected bodies. This sequence creates an insurmountable problem for the post-Tribulation theory: if this view is correct, who will be left in mortal bodies to enter the millennial kingdom, repopulate the planet, and engage in the aforementioned prophesied activities that are possible only for mortals.

A related issue is the question of who are the “sheep” in the Sheep & Goat Judgment? At this judgment, Tribulation survivors are evaluated based on their favorable treatment of the Jewish Remnant during the Tribulation. Those in the group of survivors of the Tribulation who are found to be believers will enter into the kingdom (Matt 25:34-40). However, if all believers are raptured and resurrected just before the Second Coming, and return with Christ at the Second Coming, then who would Christ evaluate at this judgment and allow to enter the kingdom?

The same holds true in the parallel judgment for the Jews who survive the Tribulation (Ezek 20:34-38). Like the Sheep and Goat Judgment (Matt 25:31-46), the purpose will be to separate believing from unbelieving Israel. The same question must be answered: Why is such a judgment necessary if the Jewish believers’ resurrected state makes his believing status already apparent?

2. The Hebrew wedding sequence.

Knowledge of the Hebrew marriage custom events negates the post-Tribulation view. This sequence of events illustrates that the Rapture, as represented by the groom returning from his father’s house at an unknown time to retrieve the bride, is one event. Moreover, the bodily return of Jesus with His church at the end of the Tribulation period, as represented by the couple being officially presented to the public, is yet another distinct event. These events are separated by an extended period of time, which is represented by the seven day interval in the father’s house between the groom returning to retrieve the bride and the new couple officially being presented to the public. The post-Tribulation view, which holds that the Rapture will occur a split second before the bodily return of Christ at the end of the Tribulation period, ignores the fact that the Rapture and the bodily appearing of Christ are two distinct events separated by an extended period of time, as symbolically portrayed by the Jewish Wedding Ceremony.

In Rev 19:7-9 the wedding feast is announced, which, if the analogy of the Hebrew marriage customs means anything, assumes that the wedding has previously taken place in the father’s house. Today the church is described as a virgin waiting for her bridegroom’s coming (2 Cor 11:2); in Rev 21 she is designated as the wife of the Lamb, indicating that

previously she has been taken to the groom's father's house. This requires an interval of time between the Rapture and the Second Coming.

3. *The pointlessness of the preparation of the believers' heavenly dwellings (John 14:2-3).*

In John 14:1-3, Jesus promised, "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." Here, speaking of His ascension, Jesus told His disciples that He would soon return to heaven. While in heaven, He would prepare dwelling places for the disciples. One future day, He would return for all of His disciples and take them out of the world to be with Him in heaven in an event otherwise known as the Rapture of the Church.

If the post-Tribulation view is accurate, then the church will be removed from the earth toward the end of the Tribulation period only to immediately return with Christ to the earth at the conclusion of the seven years. Why then did Jesus tell His disciples that He would be preparing a dwelling place for them in heaven? According to the post-Tribulation theory, the church will not spend any time with Christ in heaven. Rather, the church will be snatched up to be with Christ only to return a split second later with Him to the earth. Thus, Jesus would be preparing places in heaven for His disciples for no apparent reason.

4. *The lack of time for the Bema Seat Judgment*

In 2 Cor 5:1-8 Paul describes events that take place when the believer is "absent from the body and...present with the Lord." Then, v10 describes the Bema Seat Judgment. Thus, the Bema Seat Judgment will take place when the church is with Christ in heaven. According to 1 Thess 4:17, the event which will bring the church into heaven will be the rapture of the church.

Rev 19:7-8 portrays the church returning with Christ at the end of the Tribulation period already rewarded. These verses say, "For the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints. Notice that the bride, who represents the church (Eph 5:23), is pictured returning with Christ at the end of the Tribulation period already rewarded, as represented by the clean linen.

Because the church will experience the Bema Seat Judgment in heaven, this judgment must take place after the Rapture which is the event which will usher the church into heaven. Moreover, the church must experience this judgment before the bodily return of Christ at the end of the Tribulation because the church is pictured as returning with Christ already rewarded.

5. *The pointlessness of the church being caught up only to immediately return to the earth.*

Jesus will return with His church at the end of the Tribulation (Rev 19:7-8; Eph 5:23). If the Rapture takes place at the end of the Tribulation period as the post-Tribulation view teaches, then the church will return with Christ immediately after being raptured. In other words, the church will experience a bizarre “elevator ride” of sorts. After being caught up in the air to meet Christ, the church will immediately and instantaneously return with Him to the earth. If this is so, then what would be the point of God rapturing the church in the first place?

Then there’s the fact that the post-Tribulation view requires that the Church be present on the earth during the 70th Week of Daniel even though it wasn’t present for the first 69. Dan 9:24 also states that all 70 Weeks are for Israel.

The post-Tribulation view also denies the NT teaching of imminency—that Christ could come at any moment.

Answering Post-Tribulationalism

1. Critical passages such as 1 Thess 5:1-11 and 2 Thess 2:1-12 never say the Church will go into the Day of the Lord.
2. The argument from silence is a valid argument when used appropriately. What the apostles Paul and John *do not* say about the Church in the Tribulation must be taken into consideration.
3. The technical concept “the church” is not seen on earth from Rev 4-22.
4. Words such as “saint, elect, witness” must always be interpreted in their context.
5. The overpowering implication of the key Rapture passages clearly imply the Church will not go through the Tribulation and the wrath.
6. No where does Paul say the church will see the Antichrist.
7. Post-Tribulationalists cannot create a biblical scenario as to how the Church will go under the wrath of God and survive.
8. By saying Christians are to be “watching” for the Antichrist and living a holy life for survival, is a poor and weak argument that even most post-Tribulationalists avoid.