

The Rapture of the Church

When will it happen?

by Mike Wingfield

**Bible Study
Chart #101**

The Bible consistently indicates the Rapture will take place before the Tribulation.

Evidence from the larger context of Scripture

The Divine Purposes for the Tribulation Period (see charts #105, #106, & #107)

Those who believe the church will go through some or all the Tribulation fail to understand the divine purposes of the Tribulation Period as defined by Scripture. As explained in chart #105, the Tribulation revolves around God's final plans for Israel in preparation for the following Millennial Kingdom. Israel and the church are not the same in God's eternal plan of redemption. See chart #401. The church began in 30 AD after Israel rejected their Messiah, Jesus. The church must be removed from earth before the Tribulation begins so that God can renew His work with Israel as promised in the Bible. See chart #505.

The Chronology of the Book of Revelation (see chart #301)

The sequence of events during the Tribulation Period are outlined in [Revelation 6-19](#). The church is symbolically viewed as "the 24 elders." See chart #303. These elders appear in heaven in [Chapters 4-5](#) before the Tribulation on earth begins in Revelation 6. In [chapters 4-5](#), the elders have crowns, indicating they have been raptured and judged. They always appear in heaven during the Tribulation ([chapters 6-19](#)), and never on earth. Therefore, the clearly defined order of events in the Book of Revelation demands the church must be Raptured before the Tribulation begins.

The Rapture is an "Imminent" Event in the New Testament

A multitude of Scriptures indicate the coming of the Lord will take place at any moment ([Matthew 24:42, 44](#)). This could not be true if the believer were constantly expecting the Tribulation Period to begin. It is viewed as the next major event on God's calendar. It is explained as an event that is near or at hand ([Philippians 4:5](#); [James 5:8-9](#); [Revelation 1:3](#)). The Apostles were expecting the Lord to come in their lifetime ([1 Thessalonians 4:17](#)). They exhorted the early church to be looking and longing for Christ's return ([Hebrews 9:28](#); [10:25](#)). Therefore, if a person believes the Rapture will occur sometime during the Tribulation, he is looking for the Antichrist who will appear at the beginning of the Tribulation. The Scriptures do not exhort us to be looking for the Antichrist. However, we are continually exhorted to be looking for Jesus Christ ([Titus 2:13](#)). The early church believers in the first century believed in a false rumor that the Apostle John would not die before Jesus returned ([John 21:15-23](#)). Their acceptance of this rumor proves they were expecting Christ to come in their lifetime. When they gathered, they frequently greeted one another with the Aramaic word "maranatha" (see [1 Corinthians 16:22](#)). The word means "our Lord is coming." The Greek speaking church adopted this Aramaic (the spoken language of Jesus) word to remind each other of this blessed promise and imminent expectation of His coming. Clearly, the church was not expecting to be thrust into the Tribulation. According to Paul, they clearly understood the relationship of the Rapture to the Tribulation ([1 Thessalonians 5:1-2](#)). They knew they would not be on earth for the time of God's wrath ([1 Thessalonians 5:4-10](#)).

The Ancient Jewish Wedding Customs (see Chart #304)

The Lord has designed His promise to return for His church to conform to the ancient Jewish customs of His day. When He spoke to His disciples in the upper room about His coming for them, He used the language of a Jewish groom speaking to His bride ([John 14:1-3](#)). The apostles understood this and referred to the church as the bride of Christ ([Ephesians 5:22-33](#); [2 Corinthians 11:2](#); [Revelation 19:7-9](#); [22:17](#)). In this ancient practice, the marriage was arranged after the bride was purchased by the father of the groom ([Acts 20:28](#)). The groom would come at an unannounced time to snatch away his bride and take her to his father's house ([Matthew 25:1-13](#)). There, he would consummate the marriage and they would celebrate their marriage with a feast and live in the place he prepared for her in his father's house. The implications of the pre-tribulation Rapture fit perfectly with this practice as designed in the eternal decrees of God.

The 70 Prophetic Weeks of Daniel (see chart #505)

A very powerful and clear evidence of the church being raptured before the Tribulation begins is gleaned from an understand of a very foundational prophecy in [Daniel 9](#) – the 70 prophetic sevens [years] of Daniel. This prophecy gives us the basic chronology of the sequence of events that must take place before the Millennial Kingdom begins. It is very important to note that God told Daniel that all the events that would take place during this time frame leading up to the kingdom were related to the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem ([Daniel 9:24](#)). Daniel was informed that the kingdom of God would come after 70 groups of seven years, or 490 years. That time would begin with the commandment of a Gentile king to rebuild Jerusalem, which was destroyed during the Babylonian invasion in 586 B.C. According to [Nehemiah 2](#) [supported by historical records], the command to rebuild Jerusalem was given on March 14, 445 B.C. Exactly 483 years after this date, Jesus presented Himself to Israel on Palm Sunday. When they rejected Him, God’s prophetic clock in heaven stopped, with only seven years left before the kingdom would begin.

After Jesus ascended back to heaven, the Church Age began, as described in [Acts 2](#). While Daniel’s prophecy did not mention the time frame that would elapse between the rejection of Christ and the beginning of the final period of seven years of his prophecy, this is understood to be the historical framework for the Church Age. An understanding of Daniels’ prophecy demands the Church Age must end before God’s prophetic clock in heaven can conclude the final seven years before the kingdom of God can begin, which are connected to the Jewish people. In other words, the Church Age, from a Jewish perspective, is an interlude in God’s eternal plan as it relates to His chosen people – Israel.

In [Daniel 9:27](#), Daniel was informed that the final seven years would begin when a prince that shall come [the Antichrist] will “confirm” a covenant with Israel for seven years. That seven-year period is the same as the Tribulation, which precedes the Millennial Kingdom of God. Therefore, this intricate prophetic timeline demands that the church must be taken out before the Tribulation Period can begin. This is necessary because the Tribulation has no significance for the church. Remember? The Church Age is an interlude in God’s eternal plans for His chosen people and land. It is purely designed for Israel and the Jewish people in preparation for the Millennial Kingdom. (See chart #105.)

Evidence from other New Testament Scriptures

[Romans 11:25-26](#)- *“For I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”* In [Romans 9-11](#), the Apostle Paul spoke of the grace of God in the hearts of Jews and Gentiles. Paul explained that during the Church Age, only a remnant of Israel will be saved. But, according to the eternal plan of God, this condition will not endure forever. In [Romans 11:25-26](#), the Lord revealed that the predominately Gentile church will reach its full growth potential and be complete. Once this has been accomplished, the Lord’s former work among His chosen people, Israel, will be renewed. God’s redeeming work of Israel cannot take place until the church has been taken out of the way. That time of Israel’s redemption will take place during the Tribulation. Therefore, the church must be removed before the Tribulation Period begins. See chart #105.

[1 Thessalonians 1:10](#)- *“And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”* The church is pictured here as waiting for Jesus to return. They were waiting for Jesus, not the Tribulation Period. They were looking for Jesus, not the Antichrist. The Tribulation Period is known as the time of “the wrath of God” (see [Isaiah 13:9, 13](#); [Revelation 6:17](#); [11:18](#); [14:10](#); [15:1, 7](#); [16:1, 19](#); [19:15](#)). Later, Paul said to this church, *“For God has not appointed us to wrath...”* [1 Thessalonians 5:9](#)). These verses clearly state it is not the divine will of God to take the bride of Christ through the time of His wrath. The church has lived during the time of the age of grace. The church will be raptured at the end of the age of grace before God begins to pour out His wrath upon the wicked world during the Tribulation. The Tribulation is designed *“to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity”* ([Isaiah 26:21](#)). See Chart #106.

[Revelation 3:10](#)- As the Apostle John wrote to all the churches in his day, Jesus gave the church this promise, *“I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”* This promise states that the church will be kept from the time of Tribulation that is coming on the whole earth. The Greek word used here means “to keep away from.” Within the context of the book of Revelation, the Lord has promised that He will keep His church away from the time of Tribulation that will engulf the entire world. However, He gave us another promise that while we are in this world, we will have tribulation [times of trouble]. He said, *“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world”* ([John 16:33](#))