

When is the Rapture? An Exposition

Paul describes the rapture event is a “mystery” [1 Corinthians 15:51]! The timing of this event is a difficult topic and often is labeled as merely an intellectual pursuit. So, does an individual’s understanding of the timing of the rapture affect his walk with Christ? Perhaps surprisingly, I have come to the conclusion that it does for three specific reasons:

- 1) False hope in a pre-tribulation rapture may lead to a future doubt of God’s promises (when the rapture does not come at the anticipated time) and may cause many people to leave the faith.
- 2) Abandonment of belief in pre-tribulation rapture can bring a renewed interest in Bible prophecy as it is then more likely to be seen as applicable. All of the Scriptures are profitable [2 Timothy 3:16], and God uses them to train us in righteousness for His glory and our edification!
- 3) Pre-tribulation rapture is a key pillar that supports the dispensational theological position which separates Christians and Jews during the time of the tribulation and millennium. Thus, a change in theological construct may have a significant impact on practical application of the faith.

The topic of the timing of the rapture occasionally comes up in conversations regarding faith related topics. On a few occasions, I have been labeled and treated as foolish for not believing in pre-tribulation rapture. Often in these conversations, proponents of pre-tribulation rapture have supported their viewpoint with individual Scripture references without much regard for important things like verb tense and context. However, proper understanding of the rapture timing requires careful study of multiple passages as it is a “mystery”. This information is in my opinion very difficult to communicate well audibly.

Therefore, I have decided to write this article to point out several of the best methods that I have found pertaining to the timing of the rapture. In fact, the information presented here is critical in my belief in post-tribulation and not pre-tribulation rapture. Please be advised that I have tried to simplify the information as much as possible. Thus, much of my argument below may look more like a mathematical proof than a standard theological article. So, let’s get into it!

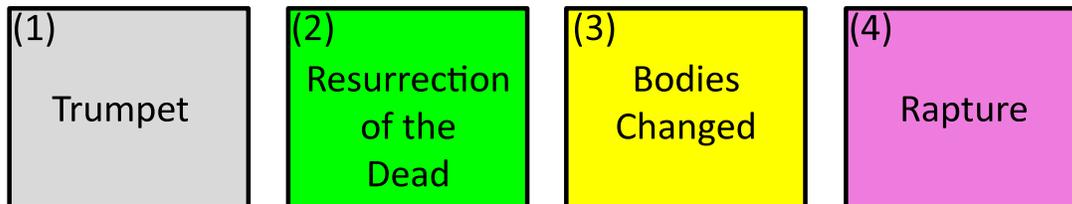
Foundational Scripture Passages on the Rapture

First, let’s examine two key passages in the New Testament regarding the rapture. Let’s observe the sequence of some major events surrounding the rapture. The reader is encouraged to further research the proper context of all of the referenced passages.

“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. 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.” – [1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, NASB]

“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but will 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 Corinthians 15:51-52, NASB]

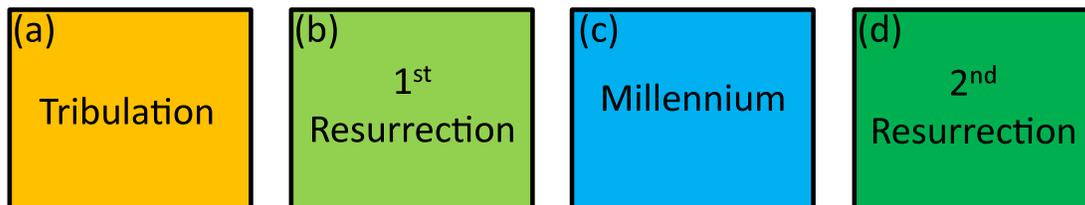
Both of these passages include words that indicate how the underlined events fit in chronological order relative to one another. The proper order is the following:



Method #1) Overall Event Sequence

“Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. 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. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will reign with Him for a thousand years.” - [Revelation 20:4-6, NASB]

In this passage, there is another sequence of events with two individual resurrection events. Also, the tribulation is mentioned in this passage as the reason why those who were raised in the 1st resurrection died. The proper order is the following:



- Event (2) from 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15 described earlier must be the 1st resurrection, because the 2nd resurrection occurs after the Millennium. Therefore, (2) = (b)
- Event (b) occurs after event (a)

Method #2) Resurrection Occurs “on the Last Day”

John 11 provides the account of the resurrection of Lazarus.

- “Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in **the resurrection** on the last day.” – [John 11:24]
 - Martha links the resurrection with the “last day”. She is most certainly referring to the 1st resurrection which occurs as (2) in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 or (b) in Revelation 20:4-6
 - If she had stated wrong information regarding the timing of the resurrection on the last day, Jesus would have certainly corrected her! However, this is not the case. In fact, in the next verse, he develops her point further!
- “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die, Do you believe this?” – [John 11:25-26].
- The Scriptures frequently refer to the “day of the Lord” which occurs after the time of tribulation
 - Zephaniah 1:14-18 indicates that the “day of the Lord” will be a “day of darkness” and a “day of **the trumpet**”.
 - In Jesus’s words in the Olivet discourse - “But in those days, **after the tribulation**, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken.” – Mark 13:24

Method #3) Chronology of the Rapture Trumpet

The most descriptive passage in the New Testament on the rapture is 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17. As specified earlier, in this passage the “trumpet of God” sets off a series of events that leads to the rapture. So, do we know anything about the timing of this trumpet blast? In fact, we do!

- 1 Corinthians 15:52 describes this trumpet as the “last trumpet”. Could it be the last trumpet of Revelation 11?
- 1 Corinthians 15:51 describes the events preceding the rapture as a “mystery”. Revelation also speaks of a “mystery” regarding a future trumpet sounding => “but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets” – [Revelation 10:7, NASB]. John connects the resolution of this “mystery” with the “voice of the seventh angel”. This seventh angel indeed sounds the 7th trumpet!
- Revelation 11 describes the 7th trumpet sounding => “Then **the seventh angel sounded**; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.’ And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying, “We give thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and **the time came for the dead to be judged**, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.” – [Revelation 11:15-18, NASB]
 - The judgment of the dead includes the 1st resurrection which ties in with 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-52

- The 7th trumpet is preceded by six other trumpets. These trumpet blasts occur in chronological sequence.
- Revelation 8 and 9 provide detail of the events of the first six trumpets. Although some may debate on whether or not these events are the “great tribulation”, there is no doubt that these are extremely tumultuous which lead up to the 7th trumpet.
- “But **immediately after the tribulation** of those days, The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with **a Great Trumpet** and they will **gather together His elect** from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.” – [Matthew 24:29-31, NASB]
 - The sequence of events in this gospel account match 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 and Revelation 20:4-6 as identified in the text above
 - Surely, the “Great Trumpet” [Matthew 24:31] = “Last trumpet” [1 Corinthians 15:52] = Seventh trumpet [Revelation 11:15]

Method #4) Purpose of the Rapture

What is the purpose of the rapture anyways? The Lord often reveals what He does and why He does it through the prophets [Amos 3:7]! The only question is whether or not we will read His Words and take them seriously.

- Revelation 11:18 (quoted previously) states that, “the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, small and the great”. We see here that the Lord’s purpose for the rapture is to reward the people that are loyal to Him.
- This purpose of rewarding is very different than the purpose of hiding proposed by the proponents of pre-tribulation rapture.
- The only two individuals who were taken from the earth without dying were Enoch [Genesis 5:24] and Elijah [2 Kings 2:11]. Neither of these individuals were “taken” from the earth by the Lord to escape persecution. In fact, they are two of the most righteous men ever to walk on earth. It is probable that they were “taken” to reward them for their righteous walk.

Method #5) History of Hiding His People

What is the precedent from the “whole counsel of scripture” [Acts 20:27] regarding the Lord caring for His people in time of deep need?

- The Exodus account details intense persecution as well as the wrath of God poured out on the inhabitants of the land and the gods they worshipped in the plagues [Exodus 10:1-11:10]. There are many similarities between these plagues and the bowls of wrath in Revelation 16. There is no record that the Israelites were taken from the earth during these plagues. In fact, they were “warned” and/or “hidden” such that plagues 7-10 did not affect them negatively.
- Isaiah 26:20-21 indicates that God hides His people from tribulation
- Micah 2:12-13 provides detail regarding the release of God’s people from their place of hiding

- Revelation 12 also provides information regarding God hiding his people in the last days

Conclusion

It was by discovery of method #1 through careful study of New Testament passages on the rapture that I was convinced that my long held views of a pre-tribulation rapture were not in line with the literal meaning of the Scriptures. And, “the Scripture cannot be broken” [John 10:34-35]. I was at a crossroads in which my hope of a pre-tribulation rapture for my own personal comfort and safety was shattered. God brought me to the point of humble submission to His ways in this matter. I now see that He wants to refine me through trials and testing regardless of the difficulty of the circumstances. I take great joy in the fact that He will hide His people during the time of tribulation that will come upon the entire earth. In fact, my heart longs for His return! “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” – [Romans 8:18, NASB]. Come Lord Jesus!