

Will the Church Go Through the Tribulation?

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Scriptural Support for the pre-Tribulation Rapture

TERMS TO UNDERSTAND

- **Tribulation**--affliction, trouble, pressure, distress (John 16:33).
- **The Tribulation**--the final seven years before Christ returns to the earth. Also referred to as Daniel's 70th week.
- **The Great Tribulation**--the last 3½ years before Christ returns to the earth. This will be the most intense and difficult time of trouble the world has ever known (Matt. 24:21).
- **The Day of the Lord**--A time when God directly intervenes in the affairs of men especially by judgment but also by way of blessing. It is often used in the Bible to describe the judgment and wrath of God poured out upon the world during the Tribulation period.
- **Daniel's 70th Week**--based on Daniel 9:24-27. This refers to the final seven years before Christ returns to the earth (the "week" being a period of seven years, not seven days).
- **The Rapture**--this term is derived from a Latin verb which was used to translate the Greek verb *harpaz* ("caught up") found in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. This Greek verb means to be snatched away, taken away suddenly, quickly removed by force from one place to another, as when Philip was caught away to another place (Acts 8:39) or when the Lord Jesus was suddenly taken up to heaven at the time of the ascension (Rev. 12:5). When Christ returns for His Church, believers will be "caught up," and suddenly taken from earth to heaven (compare John 14:3).
- **Pre-Tribulation Rapture**-- the Church will be raptured before the seven year Tribulation begins. Thus the Church will pass through none of the Tribulation. This is the correct, Biblical view as will be demonstrated in this paper.
- **Mid-Tribulation Rapture**--the Church will be raptured at the midway point of the

Tribulation, 3½ years before the Lord returns to the earth. This view teaches that the Church will pass through half of the Tribulation.

- **Pre-Wrath Rapture**--the Church will be raptured approximately midway through the second half of the Tribulation, or about 1½ or 2 years before the Lord returns to the earth. This view teaches that the Church will pass through three-quarters of the Tribulation.
- **Post-Tribulation Rapture**--the Church will be raptured at the end of the Tribulation period at the time when the Lord returns to the earth. This view teaches that the Church will pass through all of the Tribulation.

Shall We Have Tribulation?

In answer to the question, "Will the Church go through Tribulation?" we must answer "YES!" In answer to the question, "Will the Church go through THE Tribulation?" the answer is "NO!"

The following verses demonstrate that believers living in the Church Age *must go through tribulation*:

- (John 16:33b) In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.
- (Acts 14:22) Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.
- (Rom. 5:3) And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;
- (1 Thess. 1:6) And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction [tribulation], with joy of the Holy Ghost.
- (1 Thess. 3:3-4) That no man should be moved by these afflictions [tribulations]: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. (4) For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.
- (2 Tim. 3:12) Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

Believers living in this Age are not exempt from times of trouble and distress and intense pressure and persecution. However, there is a specific time of trouble which Church Age believers are exempt from: "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, 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" (Rev.3:10).

Believers are appointed unto tribulations (1 Thess. 3:3), but believers are not appointed unto wrath (1 Thess. 5:9, "wrath" referring to a specific time when God will pour out His wrath upon the earth). Believers must pass through the fires of affliction, but we will not pass through the specific fires of affliction that are reserved for Daniel's 70th week. TRIBULATION? Yes! THE TRIBULATION? No!

The Amazing 2000 Year Gap

The clearest and most complete chronological prophecy that God has given to us is the 70 week prophecy in the book of Daniel (9:24-27). These 70 weeks involve 490 years of Jewish history (each "week" equals 7 years). The first 69 weeks (483) years have been fulfilled in

history. The last week, known as Daniel's 70th week, is a seven year period which has not yet taken place in history. This is also known as the seven year Tribulation period.

After the first 69 weeks the Messiah was cut off and the Church Age began just 53 short days after the Messiah was cut off and crucified. Daniel's 70th week will not begin until a covenant or treaty is made between the Antichrist and Israel (Daniel 9:27).

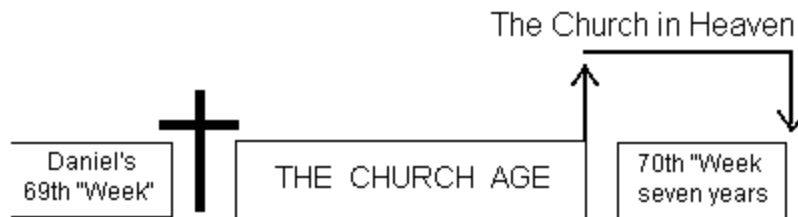
The Church Age began on the Day of Pentecost, in Acts chapter 2. The Church Age is thus nearly 2000 years in duration. How then can we explain this amazing "GAP" between the 69th week and the 70th week? It is as if God's clock for Israel has stopped, waiting to start ticking again at some future time. What has God been doing in the meantime?

During this 2000 year gap God has been:

1. Building His Church (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 3:6-9; 12:18; Eph. 2:21-22; 1 Pet. 2:5).
2. Taking out of the nations a people for His Name (Acts 15:14).
3. Bringing in the fullness of the Gentiles (Rom. 11:25).
4. Placing believers into a living organism (1 Cor. 12:13).
5. Saving a "showcase" that will eternally display His matchless grace (Eph. 2:7).
6. Manifesting Himself through His Body which is upon the earth (1 Tim. 3:15-16).

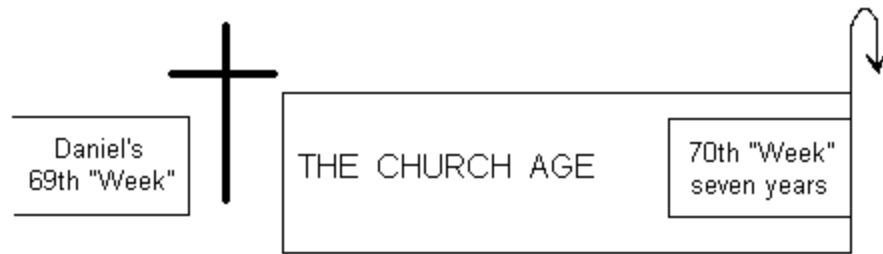
Just as the Church had an abrupt beginning shortly after the conclusion of the 69th week (the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost), so we should expect the Church to have an abrupt removal shortly before the beginning of the 70th week. The Pre-Tribulation model harmonizes perfectly with Daniel's 70th week prophecy while at the same time recognizing the parenthetical and mysterious nature of the Church Age (mysterious in the sense that it was not revealed on the pages of the Old Testament). The Pre-Tribulation model best explains this 2000 year gap and also keeps us from mixing up the Church Age with prophetic Jewish history.

Here is the Pre-Tribulational model of the 70 week prophecy (Daniel 9) as it relates to the Church Age. Notice that the Church Age is completely distinct from Daniel's 70 weeks. The Church Age is found in the gap between the 69th week and the 70th week:



Pre-Tribulation View

Here is the Post-Tribulational model of the 70 week prophecy (Daniel 9) as it relates to the Church Age. Notice that this model has the Church on earth during Daniel's 70th week (the seven year Tribulation period)



Post-Tribulation View

Here is the Pre-Wrath model of the 70 week prophecy (Daniel 9) as it relates to the Church Age. Notice that this model is very similar to the Post-Tributional model. The only difference is that the Church is on earth during three quarters of the Tribulation rather than during all of it.



Pre-Wrath View (Rosenthal / Van Kampen view)

Which model best fits the data? Which model best explains the 2000 year GAP? Which model best distinguishes between dispensations? Which views erroneously mix the Church Age with Jewish history? Which view is the least complicated?

A Comforting Hope!

Without controversy the Scriptures present the Rapture of the Church as a comforting and encouraging hope (John 14:1; 1 Thess. 4:18). The glorious reality awaiting those believers who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord is that "we shall not ... sleep" (1 Cor. 15:51). If the Church were destined to pass through the Tribulation, then these words would be of little comfort. Tribulation saints do not have the joyful expectancy of being alive unto the coming of the Lord and being exempt from physical death. To stand for Christ in that day will often mean martyrdom (Rev. 7:14; 13:15; 20:4).

This does not mean that Tribulation saints are without comfort. The comforting promise that the Lord gives to Tribulation believers is this: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13). Thus the Tribulation saints are not without hope, and yet the comfort given to them by the Lord is of a different nature than at present. In the Tribulation God will comfort those facing an imminent death. Now He comforts those facing an imminent Savior: "We shall not all sleep." "Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Populating the Millennium?

If the Rapture does not take place until the end of the Tribulation, then we are faced with the enormous problem of how the Millennial earth will be populated with people in natural bodies. The Scriptures teach that there will be people in the Millennial Kingdom in mortal bodies. These people will grow old, procreate, and give birth to children, many of whom will never get saved (Isaiah 65:20; Rev. 20:7-10, etc.).

We know according to 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 that when the Rapture takes place, all the saved will be resurrected and will thus have resurrected, immortal bodies. We also know that when Christ comes to set up His Kingdom, He will judge all the ungodly, and all the unsaved will be taken away in judgment (Matt. 13:40-43,49-51; 25:41-46). If the Rapture takes place at the end of the Tribulation, then all the saved are in resurrection bodies and the unsaved are removed from the earth. Who then will be left to re-populate the Millennial earth? The Post-Tribulationists have no satisfactory answer to this dilemma.

For the Pre-Tribulationist this poses no problem because the Church is received up into heaven seven years before Christ comes to set up His Kingdom. It is the surviving Tribulation saints, both Jews and Gentiles, who will enter the Kingdom in natural bodies.

God's Purpose for the Tribulation

The purpose of the seven year Tribulation period would favor a Pre-Tribulationist understanding for the timing of the Rapture. Daniel's 70th week relates specifically to the nation Israel ("seventy weeks are determined upon thy people"--Daniel 9:24). The Lord will deal in a special way with His chosen people so that they will be ready for the coming of the Messiah (Jer. 30:4-17). There is no reason why the Church needs to be on earth during this special time in Jewish history. The Church *does need* to be on earth until:

1. The fullness of the Gentiles comes in (Rom. 11:25).
2. God has finished calling out a people for His Name (Acts 15:14).
3. Christ finishes building His Church and adding to it (1 Cor. 3:6-9; 12:18; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:5).
4. The last believer has been placed into the Body of Christ, the Church (1 Cor. 12:13).
5. The Church is received up into Glory (1 Thess. 4:13-18 and compare 1 Tim. 3:15-16).

There is no reason why all these things could not be fulfilled prior to Daniel's 70th week, and thus prior to the time of the seven year Tribulation period.

The Rapture is Imminent!

The coming of the Lord Jesus for His Church is presented in the New Testament as an imminent hope and expectancy. That the coming of Christ is "imminent" simply means that our Lord *may come* at any time. Nothing needs to happen before He comes. No prophecy needs to be fulfilled before He comes. It may be today! Such an expectation is well supported by an abundance of Scriptural testimony:

1. (John 14:3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also.
2. (Rom. 13:11) And that, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep:

- for now *is* our salvation nearer than when we believed.
3. (1 Cor. 1:7) So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 4. (1 Cor. 11:26) For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come.
 5. (1 Cor. 15:51-52) Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, (52) In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.
 6. (1 Cor. 16:22) If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema [.] Maranatha ["Our Lord cometh!"].
 7. (Phil. 3:20) For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.
 8. (Phil. 4:5) Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord *is* at hand.
 9. (Col. 3:4) When Christ, *who is* our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.
 10. (1 Thess. 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.
 11. (1 Thess. 4:17) 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.
 12. (Titus 2:13) Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.
 13. (Heb. 9:28) So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.
 14. (Heb. 10:25) Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.
 15. (James 5:8) Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.
 16. (1 John 2:28; 3:3) And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming....And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.
 17. (Jude 21) Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.
 18. (Rev. 22:20) He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. (cf. Rev. 3:11; 22:7,12).

As the above passages indicate, believers are to be constantly waiting for and looking for and expecting His coming and His appearing. We are to look for and eagerly await the glorious appearing of our Great God, even our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Tit. 2:14). It is interesting that we are not told to be looking for the man of sin (the Antichrist) to be revealed. We are not told to be looking for the 144,000 Jews who will be sealed by God during the time of Daniel's 70th week. We are not told to be looking for "the abomination of desolation" to be set up in Jerusalem. We are told to be looking for Christ Himself.

None of the Tribulation events will take place prior to the removal of the Church; otherwise the Rapture would not be imminent. If the Rapture were not to take place until sometime during the last 3½ years (as the Pre-Wrath Rapture view teaches), then this would destroy the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ. We would know that before the Rapture could take

place, the treaty (covenant) would need to be made with Israel at the beginning of Daniel's 70th week (Dan. 9:27) and "the abomination of desolation" would need to be set up at the middle of Daniel's 70th week (Matt. 24:15). We would look for these events to happen before we could even begin to expect Christ to come for His Church.

Was Paul looking for the imminent return of Christ? Paul expected that Christ would come for him because he considered himself part of the group that would be alive on earth at the time of the Rapture. Notice that Paul includes himself by using the personal pronoun WE--"WE which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep....Then WE which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air..." (1 Thess. 4:15,17). Of course we now know that Paul was not part of that group of believers living at the time of the Rapture. Instead he was part of the "dead in Christ" group mentioned in verse 16 (also described as "them who are asleep"--verse 15). But because of his belief in the imminent return of Christ, Paul believed he might be found among the believers living on earth at the time of the Lord's coming for His Church.

Notice also Paul's use of the pronoun "we" in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, "Behold, I show you a mystery; WE shall not all sleep, but WE shall all be changed, (52) In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and WE shall be changed." Notice that Church Age believers are divided into two groups: (1) the dead that shall be raised and (2) those alive at Christ's coming who will not sleep (who will not die physically) but who will be changed. Paul believed he might be part of this second group, although we now know that Paul was actually part of the first group. Paul, living in the first century, expected that he might be among the generation of believers who would not see physical death. How much more ought we to have this blessed expectation!

Looking for the Kingdom?

John's closing words in the book of Revelation were these: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). Why did John close the book of Revelation with these words? John had been privileged to catch a vision of the glorious Millennial Kingdom of Christ (Rev. 20). Even during the Lord's earthly ministry John was one of the select few who saw the Son of man coming in His Kingdom by means of the preview afforded by the transfiguration (Matt. 16:28-17:1-6; 2 Peter 1:16-18). Since John knew so much of the glories of the Kingdom, why did he not close his book with this prayer: "THY KINGDOM COME! LET THY KINGDOM COME!" (compare Matt. 6:10)?

When the Lord gave the model prayer of Matthew 6:10, the Kingdom was indeed imminent (cf. Matt. 3:2; 4:17;10:7); and indeed, the prayer of the Tribulation saints will certainly include this petition: "THY KINGDOM COME!" But the aged Apostle John hoped that he might be alive and remaining unto the coming of the Lord according to the Lord's promise in John 21:23-24: "What if he (John) tarry till I come?" John was looking for Christ, not the Kingdom. Rather than look for the Kingdom, he was looking for the KING. Even so, be coming, Lord Jesus!

Salvation, Not Wrath

In 1 Thessalonians 5:9, Church Age believers are told that "God hath not appointed us to

wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." Thus as we look to the future we should expect SALVATION and not WRATH.

What did Paul mean when he spoke of WRATH and what did he mean when he spoke of SALVATION?

(1) WRATH. Believers are not appointed unto wrath. We have been delivered from the wrath that is coming (see 1 Thess. 1:10). Although it is true that believers are delivered from the wrath of God which the ungodly will forever face in the lake of fire, Paul's focus in 1 Thessalonians 5 is upon the "day of the Lord" (verse 2-3), a very specific time when God's wrath will be poured out upon earth dwellers. This period of wrath is also described in Revelation chapters 6-19. It is also known as the greatest time of trouble or tribulation the world has ever known (Matt. 24:21). God has not appointed us to face this time of wrath. Instead we have an appointment to meet the Lord in the air prior to the unleashing of God's fury upon the earth.

(2) SALVATION. People obtain salvation the moment they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31), but the SALVATION spoken of by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:9 refers to the believer's final salvation when Christ comes for us to complete the great salvation which He began! Thus, instead of facing God's wrath being poured out on the earth, we will enjoy the consummation of our so-great salvation. What a comforting hope (verse 11 and compare 1 Thess. 4:18)!

The Removal of the Restrainer

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8 we learn that the man of sin will not be revealed until the Restrainer is taken out of the way (out of the midst). Who is this Restrainer?

In verse 6 He is described in neuter terms: "And now ye know what withholdeth [*lit.*, that which restrains] that he might be revealed in his time." In verse 7 He is described in masculine terms: "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth [restrains] *will let* [*restrain*], until He be taken out of the way."

How can the Restrainer be both neuter and masculine? This only makes good sense if the Restrainer be God the Holy Spirit. He is masculine because He is the blessed third Person of the Triune Godhead. He is neuter because the Greek word for "Spirit" (*pneuma*) is always neuter in gender. Thus the Bible sometimes describes the Holy Spirit in masculine terms (see John 16:13-14 and notice how many times the pronoun "He" is used) and sometimes describes the Holy Spirit in neuter terms (see Rom. 8:16, KJV, "The Spirit itself...").

That which is restraining evil today is the Blessed Person of the Holy Spirit who is now dwelling in a unique and special way in the Church which is Christ's Body (Eph. 2:22; 1 Cor. 3:16; John 14:17). When the Church is removed by means of the Rapture, the Spirit of God will be taken out of the way. That is, He will no longer be on the earth in the sense of indwelling a body of believers. Just as He came on the day of Pentecost in a special way, so He will "leave" at the time of the Rapture (though obviously He will still be working in the hearts of men during the Tribulation just as He was working in the hearts of men prior to Pentecost). The Church must be removed before the man of sin is revealed. The man of sin will be revealed when he makes a treaty with Israel (Dan. 9:27), and this will mark the beginning of

Daniel's 70th week. Thus the Church must be removed prior to the beginning of Daniel's 70th week (prior to the 7 year Tribulation).

God's Outline of the Book of Revelation

The God-given outline of the book of Revelation harmonizes perfectly with the Pre-Tribulation position. The outline of the book is given in Revelation 1:19--

- "the things which thou hast seen" (Chapter 1)
- "the things which are" (Chapters 2-3)
- "the things which shall be hereafter" (Chapter 4-22).

Thus the book could be outlined as follows:

<p><i>"THE THINGS WHICH THOU HAST SEEN"</i></p> <p>Chapter 1--John's Vision of Christ</p> <p><i>"THE THINGS WHICH ARE"</i></p> <p>Chapters 2-3--The Church (7 churches of Asia Minor)</p> <p><i>"THE THINGS WHICH SHALL BE HEREAFTER"</i></p> <p>Chapters 4-19--The Tribulation (Daniel's 70th Week)</p> <p>Chapter 20--The Millennial Reign of Christ</p> <p>Chapters 21-22--The New Heavens and New Earth</p>

It is significant that although the Church is mentioned repeatedly in chapters 1-3, it is never mentioned as being on the earth in chapters 4-19, the chapters that deal with the Tribulation period. The reason is obvious: the Church is removed from earth to heaven by way of the Rapture (John 14:3). The Church will thus be kept from the hour of testing which will come upon all the world, to test them that dwell upon the earth, according to Revelation 3:10.

Another key chapter which focuses upon the Tribulation is Matthew chapter 24. The Church is not mentioned in this chapter either.

The Key Pre-Tribulational Passage

The most important single passage dealing with the timing of the Rapture is Revelation 3:10, "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from [out of] the hour of temptation [testing, trial], which shall come upon all the world, to try [test] them that dwell upon the earth."

The promise is made specifically to the first century church of Philadelphia in Asia, but

students of prophecy recognize that this verse was given for Church Age believers of any age as an encouragement to remain loyal to the Lord in the midst of difficult times. Indeed, the first century believers that made up the assembly in Philadelphia never lived to see the time of trouble that this verse describes. "The hour of testing" spoken of by the Lord would not be fulfilled for some two thousand years, and yet the Lord was true to His promise to the Philadelphian believers even as He is true to this same promise with respect to Church Age believers living today.

There is coming a day when the entire world will be on trial. God will be the awesome Judge and all those who dwell on the earth will endure this time of terrible testing. Isaiah describes it as "a consumption [decisive destruction], even determined upon the whole earth" (Isaiah 28:22). It will be a time of great testing for Israel, described by Jeremiah as "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:6-7). The Lord Jesus described this time as a unique time of trouble which would be worldwide in scope: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt. 24:21). It will be a time that will involve the terrible plagues and judgments described graphically in Revelation chapters 6-16.

The Lord's promise is conditional: If you keep My Word, I will keep you from the hour of testing. Who are those who keep His Word? Who are those who keep His command? In Revelation 12:17 and 14:12, we learn that it is the saints (true believers) who keep God's Word (God's commandments). The same is true of John 8:51: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." The true believer, the one who has eternal life and who never sees death, is here described as the one who keeps His command/Word.

Believers are not always obedient to the Word of their Master. Every believer, if honest, would recognize areas of his life where he has not been obedient to God's Word. However, as God views the life of the true believer in its totality, it is a life characterized by obedience. It is a life characterized by keeping His Word: "And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:3). The person whose life is characterized by disobedience is the person who does not truly know Christ in a saving way (see 1 John 2:4).

Our Lord's disciples were not always totally obedient to their Master. Peter, for example, seriously denied His Lord and later was rebuked by Paul for not walking uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel of grace (Gal. 2:11-14). And yet, when the Lord Jesus viewed the lives of the disciples, including Peter, He made this amazing statement, "they have kept Thy Word" (John 17:6). Though they had their faults and were at times guilty of disobedience, yet their lives in general were characterized by obedience.

Thus in Revelation 3:10, those who have kept His Word are those who are saints, that is, true believers. It does not refer to a group of "obedient believers" in contrast to other believers who are not obedient. If this were the case, then only the "obedient believers" would be "kept from the hour" and removed from the earth, resulting in a partial rapture. But there is no such thing as a partial rapture. The Rapture includes all living believers without exception.

Notice that the Lord promised believers in Revelation 3:10 that they would be kept, not just from the TESTING which would severely test the earth dwellers, but that they would be kept *from the* HOUR of testing. They would not only be kept from the testing, but they would be kept from the TIME of testing. "I also will keep thee from the hour [TIME] of temptation [testing], which shall come upon all the world, to try [test] them that dwell upon the earth." The

only way to be kept *from the* HOUR of testing is to be removed from the earth before that "hour" commences.

The Second World War was a time of trial and trouble for much of the world. Suppose you lived on earth prior to this great war, and you were given this promise: "You will be kept from the trial of World War II." This means that you would not face any of the bullets or bombs or battles of the war. Perhaps you would be located in a part of the world not directly involved in the conflict. You could still be in the world, but protected from the war. But suppose you were given this promise: "You will be kept from the TIME of World War II." For this to be fulfilled you could not be on earth during the entire period of years from 1941 to 1945. To be exempt from *the time* is to be absent at the time when the event takes place.

The expression "kept from" is very important. It does not mean "preservation through" or "preservation in" but it means "exemption from." The Post-Tribulation view and the Pre-Wrath view both see the believer staying on the earth during the Tribulation period. "Preservation through" would fit their view because they understand that God will preserve the Church through the Tribulation or through most of the Tribulation. "Exemption from" best fits the Pre-Tribulation view because the Church is not on the earth at all during the Tribulation and thus the Church is exempt from the trials and troubles associated with that *time*. The term "kept from" best fits the idea of "exemption from."

Literally this phrase means "to be kept out of" [Greek, *ek*]. Its meaning is similar to how we use these terms in English. To be *kept out of* jail means that the person will not be behind bars. To be *kept out of* the swimming pool means that the person is exempt from getting wet. To be *kept out of* the army means that the person was not allowed in the army, and thus he was exempt from serving in the army. If a basketball player was *kept out of* the entire ball game, it means that he did not get to play at all. He did not see any action. If a sign on a person's property said, "KEEP OUT!" then this means that the person did not want you on his property at all. He did not want your presence there at all. Moses was *kept out of* the promised land, which means that he did not enter Palestine at all. To be KEPT OUT OF "the hour of trial" that will come upon all the world means that the person will not enter that time at all. He will be exempt from that time. He will not be present on earth during that time.

The phrase "kept out of" is used by the Apostle John in one other place. It is found in John 17:15, "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from [out of] the evil [one]." The Lord's will for His believers of this present Age is not to be removed from this world, but to be His witnesses in the world. We are in the world but not of the world. The key issue in this verse involves the believer's relationship to the realm of Satan, the evil one. As saved people, are we still IN the realm of Satan, or have we been delivered out of that realm? Does God keep us out of the realm and power of the evil one or are we still in it?

The answer is found in Colossians 1:13-- "Who hath delivered us from [out of] the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of His dear Son." We once were in the realm of the power of darkness, but we have been delivered out of that realm when we were saved.

The Apostle John sets forth this truth in 1 John 5:18, "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." In harmony with our Lord's prayer in John 17:15, believers are kept from or out of the

wicked one so that he (Satan) does not touch them at all! He no longer has any kind of a hold on us. We have been removed totally from his kingdom and from his realm. We now belong to the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us! Yes, we are in the world, but we are kept OUT OF the evil one! As far as having Satan for our ruler, we are totally exempt!

Another passage written by the Apostle John is significant in understanding Revelation 3:10. It is found in John 12:27, "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from [out of] this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour." Although the verb "to keep" is not used in this verse, it is similar to Revelation 3:10 in that the preposition "out of" [Greek, *ek*] is used as well as the word "hour." It is clear that our Lord prayed for exemption from the hour when He would bear the sins of the world and be separated from God His Father: "Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me..." (Luke 22:42). But the Lord Jesus must follow the path of obedience to His Father's will: "But for this cause came I unto this hour.... nevertheless not My will, but Thine be done." (John 12:27; Luke 22:42). The Lord Jesus did not want to drink the cup of the wrath of God. He prayed that He might be exempt from that hour; but most of all He wanted to obey His heavenly Father regardless of the cost.

CONCLUSION: In Revelation 3:10 the Lord promised His Church Age believers that they would be exempt from the hour of trial or trouble that would come upon all the world. He did not promise to keep us through this time or to keep us in this time, but He promised to keep us out of this time. He will keep us out of this time by removing us from the earth prior to Daniel's 70th week. This great event is described in John 14:1-3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and in several other passages.

The Lord says:

"Surrely I come quickly."

The Church responds:

*"Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" --
Rev.22:20*

Some Questions about the Rapture

1. Is the term "rapture" found in the Bible?

Yes and no. It is not found in the English translation of the Bible (KJV), but it is derived from a Latin verb (*rapere*, to snatch, seize) which was used in the Latin Bible to translate the Greek verb "caught up" (*harpaz*) in 1 Thessalonians 4:17-- "Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be CAUGHT UP [raptured] together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." It is very interesting to see how this verb "caught up" is used in the New Testament. Study the following verses: Acts 8:39 ("caught away"), 2 Corinthians 12:2,4 ("caught up"), Revelation 12:5 ("caught up"); John 10:28-29 ("pluck out of"), etc.

2. Has a rapture-like event ever taken place in history?

Yes, on several occasions. Enoch was suddenly removed from earth by God. God took him (Gen. 5:21-24). Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven (2 Kings 2:11). Philip was raptured (suddenly removed) from one place to another (Acts 8:39). Paul was raptured to the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2,4). The Lord Jesus was raptured to heaven at the ascension (Rev. 12:5). But that a whole generation of believers will suddenly be removed from earth to heaven without seeing physical death is an event unprecedented in the history of the world (compare 1 Cor. 15:51).

3. What do people mean when they say "secret rapture"?

This is a common term used by men who deny the Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church. In what sense is the rapture a secret? In 1 Corinthians 15:51 the truth pertaining to the Rapture is called a "mystery." This means that it was a truth that was unrevealed to men in previous ages. Moses, David, Isaiah and John the Baptist knew nothing of the rapture of the Church. It was a secret or mystery that had not yet been revealed. However, a New Testament "mystery" is something that was once hidden but now revealed. God has made it known to His saints and it is a secret no more. Paul said, "I shew you a mystery." If he showed it to us, then it is no longer hidden. It is clearly revealed to those who have ears to hear and eyes to see.

The Rapture is also a secret event in the sense that it will occur suddenly and be unannounced to the world. There will be no forewarning. It will take place at God's appointed time and it will take the world by surprise. It will be over before the world has time to realize that it happened.

4. Will the Rapture be a "silent rapture"?

When Christ calls His Church to Himself there will be sounds and noise involved. "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15:52b). "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thess. 4:16).

How much of this noise the unsaved will hear is not revealed in Scripture. The event will happen so suddenly and will take place so quickly that it is probable that the only thing the unsaved will notice is the sudden disappearance of those who are true believers. So it was in the case of Enoch. He was there and suddenly "he was not; for God took him" (Gen. 5:24).

5. How quickly will the Rapture take place?

This is answered in 1 Corinthians 15:52, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." The word "moment" is interesting. It is the Greek word "*atom*." The word *atom* means "not cut, you cannot cut it anymore." Suppose you were to keep cutting up a pie into smaller and smaller pieces. If you had a knife sharp enough and small enough you could keep cutting the pieces down to the point where you could not cut the pieces or particles any smaller. We call this an "atom." [However, we now know that you can even cut atoms into smaller particles].

The term "*atom*" is also used of time. We can cut time into years and into days and into hours

and into minutes and into seconds. An "atom of time" is the smallest measurement of time (the point where you can't cut time anymore). In English we might call this a "split-second." How fast will the Rapture take place? In a split second, in the twinkling of an eye. If you blink, you will miss it!

6. As the Rapture takes place, what is the order of events?

This is answered in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

FIRST, God (in the Person of Christ) will come down from heaven and He will bring with Him the souls of those "which sleep in Jesus," that is, who have died in Christ (see verse 16 and verse 14).

SECOND, those who have died in Christ will rise first (v. 16). Their bodies will be raised from the graves.

THIRD, those believers who are alive and remain unto the coming of Christ will be caught up or raptured. Thus those who have died in Christ and those who are alive when Christ returns will together meet the Lord in the air, to be with Him forever (v. 17 and see John 14:3).

7. When was the Rapture first revealed?

The Rapture was not revealed until the Lord spoke the words "receive you to Myself" found in John 14:1-3 the night before He died on the cross. Don't make the mistake of looking for the Rapture in Matthew chapter 24. His coming mentioned in Matthew chapter 24 is His coming to the earth following the great Tribulation.

8. What about those who set dates for the Rapture?

Edgar Whisenant wrote a book entitled, *88 Reasons Why The Rapture Could Be In 1988*. Of course, the Lord did not come in 1988 so a new book might have been written: *89 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Take Place in 1989*. Someone surmised that the added reason given in the new book could be this: "Reason #89--Because He did not come in 1988."

Many others have foolishly tried to set dates. ⁽¹⁾ How unwise to try to announce that which God has chosen not to reveal? God has not told us the time. He wants us to be ready always.

9. If a person rejects Christ before the Rapture can he be saved after the Rapture?

There are some who teach that those who do not get saved prior to the Rapture have no hope of being saved after the Rapture. This view is based upon a misunderstanding of 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12: "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. (11) And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: (12) That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." They understand this passage to mean that if a person rejects the truth prior to the Rapture, he will be deluded and unable to believe following the Rapture. Who then will be saved during the Tribulation? They teach that those saved during the Tribulation will be only those who never heard the Gospel prior to the Rapture.

What does the passage really teach? These verses in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 are not talking about people who reject the truth *before* the Rapture. They are referring to people who reject the truth *during* the Tribulation. These are people who wilfully decide to follow the devil's man (see the context of 2 Thess. 2:3-9). These are people who reject the truth and receive the LIE that the man of sin is to be honored as God and worshiped. These are those who deliberately choose to take the mark of the beast and worship this evil man. According to Revelation 14:9-11, those who take the mark cannot be saved. Their destiny is Hell. Thus, during the Tribulation, those who wilfully identify with the devil's man are *doomed* and *damned* (2 Thess. 2:12). In that day the issue will be very clear: worship God (Rev. 14:6-7) or worship the devil's man (Rev. 14:9-11). One's choice will determine one's eternal destiny.

If a person refuses to believe on Christ prior to the Rapture, there is still hope that he will trust Christ after the Rapture. His earlier rejection was not final and not fatal. God still reaches out to men in grace during the Tribulation. However, it is always dangerous to reject the truth, no matter when you live. The time to be saved is today, not tomorrow. If a person refuses to be saved today, what guarantee does he have that he will be willing to be saved in the future?

If a person refuses to trust Christ today when it is easy (for many, little or no persecution), why should this person be willing to trust Christ tomorrow when it will be very difficult (great persecution for believers during the Tribulation). Those who reject the Gospel today are in danger of rejecting the Gospel tomorrow. The person who rejects the Gospel before the Rapture could very well be one of those who will worship the man of sin during the Tribulation. Those who are unbelievers today will probably be unbelievers tomorrow.

God can certainly save a person who at one time strongly rejected the truth. Remember Saul of Tarsus. Remember how you yourself once rejected the truth before you were saved! During the Tribulation, God will be willing and able to save all those who will turn to Him. The same is true today: "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25).

The time to believe is now. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). It is never safe to delay such a decision. The time to be saved is now, prior to the Rapture.

Isaiah summed up the duty of man regardless of what dispensation he lives in: "Seek ye the LORD while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: (7) Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon Him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6-7).

THE RAPTURE	
As taught by our Lord (<i>John 14:1-3</i>)	As taught by Paul (<i>1 Thess. 4:13-18</i>)
Comforting Words	
"Let not your heart be troubled."	"Comfort one another with these words."
The Necessity of Personal Faith	
"Ye believe in God, believe also in Me."	"If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even them also which sleep in Jesus will

	God bring with Him."
We Can Take Christ at His Word	
"If it were not so, I would have told you."	"This we say unto you by the Word of the Lord."
The Promise of His Coming	
"I will come again."	"The Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven."
The Remarkable Removal from Earth	
"and receive you unto Myself."	"We...shall be caught up... to meet the Lord in the air."
Forever Present with the Lord	
"That where I am, there ye may be also."	"and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

Adapted from *God's Prophecies For Plain People*, William L. Pettingill (Philadelphia School of the Bible, 1923), pages 22-23.

1. Harold Camping predicted that Jesus Christ would return on or between September 15, 1994 and September 27, 1994. A 10 page review of his book is available from Pastor George Zeller for \$1.00.

The Middletown Bible Church, 349 East Street Middletown, CT 06457 (860) 346-0907