

# **“Reasons I Believe in the Pretribulation Rapture”**

By

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It wasn't all that long ago that I held a post-tribulation view of the return of Christ. When I was an Adventist minister I upheld the post-tribulation doctrine that my employer taught and I approached the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation with those pre-conceived interpretations.

Part of me was always discontented with the denomination's doctrine and its common approach to extract a post-tribulation teaching by picking at parts of Bible prophecy while ignoring the sequence of the whole.

After leaving the Adventist denomination in 1999 and still feeling at a loss of biblical understanding on my beliefs about the rapture, I opted for a “pan-trib” view. What's the “pan-trib” view you ask? Well, the “pan-trib” view is the position that trusts it will all pan-out in the end so why fret about a pre-trib or a post-trib view now.

I was enjoying my non-committal “pan-trib” view until February 2015 when I found myself attended a church planters meeting with Pastor Sandy Adams at Calvary Chapel Stone Mountain, Georgia where Sandy challenged us to be firm in our belief on this topic. He didn't know it, but I left that weekend conference a bit disturbed by his challenge of my beloved “pan-trib” view.

I left Stone Mountain, Georgia disregarding his challenge, but by the time I arrived back home in Mobile, Alabama the Spirit of God was burning within me to settle this doctrine in my soul once and for all. So, in the ensuing weeks and months, I sought to “rightly divide the word of truth” by prayerfully reading through the books of Daniel and Revelation just as written, without picking here and there to prove a pre-conceived point.

I prayed for the Author of the Bible to clearly bring His truth to my understanding and give me a certain conviction, one way or the other, either post-trib or pre-trib, that one or the other would surface to the top of my study. Sure enough, by approaching books as written I began to see how the pre-tribulation rapture fits in a natural unfolding of end-time prophecies and biblical references of our Lord's return.

Here, In this paper, I have simply laid-out four objections that I once had against the pretribulation rapture and then ten reasons why I now believe in a pretribulation rapture.

My purpose here is not to be exhaustive on this subject, it is not to make this topic a salvific issue or a test of fellowship, because it is not, but my intention is to simply answer as to why I hope in the soon return of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

If you are interested in digging deeper on this topic I would suggest looking to the work and writings of such Bible teachers as Norman Geisler, Ron Rhodes, John Walvoord, Dwight Pentacost, Warren Wiersbe, John MacArthur, Thomas Ice, Mark Hitchcock, and David Jeremiah.

So let's begin with my once held objections followed by my now held reasons to believe in the pretribulation rapture...

## **Four Objections I Once Had Against the Pretribulation Rapture**

**Objection #1** – I once objected to the pre-trib rapture view because it was irritating to me that I often heard it called the “secret rapture.” Primarily because as I read **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** I could not understand how the ascension of millions, the resurrection of dead people, a cry, the voice of the archangel, and a trumpet sound could be secret.

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** shares the words of Paul, *“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”* (ESV)

I now understand that the term “secret” is not the common term or necessarily the biblical description of the event but man’s attempt to explain the catching up of the church mentioned in this passage. It is sometimes referred to as secret because of the sudden rapture of the church.

The specific word “rapture” is not used in the passage, but the word “**harpazo**” is and that is where the term rapture is derived from. Harpazo means to snatch, to seize, to take suddenly, and to take without warning. The same word “harpazo” is used by Paul in being caught up to Heaven (**2 Corinthians 12:2-4**), it is used of Philip in being transported by the Spirit (**Acts 8:39**), and used of Jesus’ ascension into heaven (**Acts 1:11, Revelation 12:5**).

I now understand that it is mainly the post-tribulationist that like to refer to the rapture as secret, not the pre-tribulationist. Pre-tribulationist are doing all within their ability to make the good news of the rapture known to people, not secret to others!

I often heard other post-tribulationist point to **Matthew 24:40** on “two in the field, one taken and one left” as the basis for claiming that pre-tribulationist think the rapture is secret, but the application in that context is taken for judgement, not in the rapture, and most pre-trib folks know that.

In case you’re asking, what about **Revelation 1:17** on “every eye will see” and **Matthew 24:27** “lightning from the east” passages? These passages are sometimes given as proof texts against the “secret” rapture but they really have application in the context of the second coming of Christ to establish His Kingdom on earth.

Some pre-tribulationist do use the term “secret” when referring to the rapture, but I don’t and many of other Bible teaches do not, but it certainly is no longer a stumbling block for me.

**Objection #2** – I once objected to the pre-trib rapture view as complicated and pro-longed in its events, while I saw the post-trib view as simple and concise in its events. The distinction between the rapture and the second coming was something hard for me to grasp, coming from a post-trib Adventist doctrine.

However, it occurred to me one day that complicated is sometimes God's way of working out salvation for the greatest amount of people, and just because a doctrine is simple to my understanding does not necessarily make it biblical.

I now understand the events of the return of the Lord in terms of Jesus’ return (**1 Thessalonians 4**) for the church before the great time of tribulation and Jesus’ return (**Revelation 19**) to establish His millennial Kingdom on earth. The rapture is Jesus’ return for the church and the second coming is Jesus’ return to earth.

**Objection #3** – I once objected to the pre-trib rapture view because I was confused as to why there would be a rapture to redeem from a coming tribulation when so many saints have been left to face persecution for the faith. Persecution, or tribulation, seemed like a guaranteed and inevitable circumstance for all believers in the last day so I wondered why some dared to think we would escape that fate.

It finally dawned on me that the tribulation assured Christians is *persecution for their faith*, but the tribulation the Christian escapes is *the wrath of God's judgement against the wicked*.

I now understand that there is a difference between persecution as a believer and wrath as a sinner. We have passages that mention the term “tribulation” in both the context of persecution and wrath, but the tribulation that the church escapes through the rapture is God’s wrath against un-repentant wicked.

As I read through Revelation, without jumping around as I did with my pre-concieved post-trib view, it was striking to me that there is no mention of the church during those passages detailing the wrath of God on the earth. The implication of Revelation is the church had been raptured and has escaped the wrath upon the wicked, just like in Exodus with the final seven plaques or with Lot in Sodom or in the flood with Noah's family when they escaped the wrath of God.

**Objection #4** – I once objected to the pre-trib rapture view because I had thought it was a recent idea purported by a man named John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) and no reference to it could be found in the early church. The problem I had with that was I had always assumed that an earlier view of doctrine would likely be a more accurate view of a doctrine.

It finally occurred to me that at one time people thought the earth was flat, but we know that the newer view is the correct view because the earth is a sphere. We also know that the early translations of Scripture lacked the multitude of available manuscripts that we now have to more accurately translate Scripture.

**Dr. Norman Geisler** has put it this way, "something can be new and true as it can be old and false."

However, I did discover that there are references to a pre-trib rapture that predate 1800's and those include an excerpt from Ephraem of Syria (c. 306-373) in his *"Sermon on the last Times, the Antichrist, and the End of the World"* when he wrote *"For all the saints and elect of God are gathered, prior to the tribulation that is to come, and are taken to the Lord lest they see the confusion that is to overwhelm the world because of our sin."*

It is thought that since the Roman Catholic church dominated much of church history that their bias against a literal rapture and a literal millennial reign of Christ is reason for a lack of abundant preserved references on this topic, although they do exist including the following:

A sect known as the Dolicinites (c. 1304) held a pre-trib rapture view similar to the views held by today's pre-tribulationists.

Peter Jurieu, in his book *"Approaching Deliverance of the Church"* (1687) taught the rapture of the saints and return to Heaven before the battle of Armageddon.

We have New Testament commentaries by Philip Doddridge (1738) and John Gill (1748) writing about the rapture of the church before the tribulation.

In 1744, a Baptist preacher by the name of Morgan Edwards spoke of a rapture of the church as distinctly separate from a later second coming of Christ. Edwards wrote *"The dead saints will be raised, and the living changed at Christ's "appearing in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17)...will He and they abide in the air all that time? No: they will ascend to paradise, or to some*

one of these many “mansions in the Father’s house” (**John 14:2**), and disappear during the foresaid period of time.”

James Macknight (1763) and Thomas Scott (1792) taught that the church will be carried to heaven where they will be secure until the time of judgement was over.

Not surprisingly, I now know that the rapture is a doctrine that was mentioned, taught, and believed earlier than John Nelson Darby in the late 1800’s.

## **Ten Reasons I Now Believe in the Pretribulation Rapture**

**Reason #1** – The Bible, in 1 Thessalonians, specifically mentions that the church will be delivered from wrath.

**1 Thessalonians 5:9-10** says “*For God has not destined us for wrath*, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.” (ESV)

**1 Thessalonians 1:9-10** says “For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, *Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*” (ESV)

In case you’re thinking, maybe the meaning of delivering us from wrath is about delivering us from hell, let me just point out that the context of **1 Thessalonians 5** is not eternal wrath of hell, but tribulation judgement on earth.

It is also noteworthy that according to **1 Thessalonians 1:10** this is earthly wrath because one can be rescued from it by the return of Christ.

**Reason #2** – In **Revelation 3:10-11** we read that the church will be kept from the time of tribulation.

“Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, *I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world*, to try those who dwell on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.” **Revelation 3:10-11** (ESV)

In case you’re thinking, maybe this is a promise of delivery only for that local church, let me point out that **Revelation 3:13** mentions “churches” plural and in **Revelation 3:10** it is mentioned that this tribulation will “come upon the whole world” not just there in Asia Minor.

**Reason #3** – There is a noticeable absence of the mention of the church is not mentioned in the tribulation prophecies of **Revelation 6-18**.

In **Revelation 1-3** the word church is used 19 times, then between 6-18 it is not used at all, and it reoccurs again after the second coming of Christ to earth in **Revelation 19**.

In case you're thinking, why does **Revelation 6:9** talk about those killed because of the word of God and of **Revelation 13:7** talking about the Antichrist making war against the saints, let me point out that there will be conversation of tribulation saints who will respond to the gospel as given in accordance with **Revelation 14:6-7**.

**Dr. Normam Geisler**, in his work Systematic Theologoly, Volume 4, page 614, states *"The word saints, used several times during the Tribulation, need not mean 'those who were believers in Christ before the Tribulation began.' There were saints (godly ones) in the Old Testament (Psalm 85:8), there are saints today (1 Corinthians 1:2), and there will be saints during the Tribulation (Revelation 13:7); this is a common word for believers of all ages."*

**Reason #4** – Jesus promised that when He returns He will take us back to His Father's house.

In **John 14:2-3** He said, *"In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."* (ESV)

There is a correlation here with the Jewish bridal customs of the groom going to his father's house to prepare a room for his bride to be, then when it is finished going out to get his bride, then spending 7 days in feast before presenting the bride and groom to the community.

**Reason #5** – The separation of the "sheep" and "goats" mentioned in **Matthew 25** would not be necessary if there was no pretribulation rapture.

The reason the separation will need to occur is because some unbelievers (goats), who miss the rapture, will become believers (sheep) during the tribulation period.

If the rapture and second coming are one and the same, there would be no need for this separation of sheep and goats as related in **Matthew 25**, because that would require some type of judgement investigation to occur before Jesus could leave Heaven to reign and rescue His bride.

**Reason #6** – **Revelation 19**, which describes the second of coming of Jesus to earth to end the tribulation period, makes no mention of **1 Thessalonians 4:17** catching up of the church.

**Revelation 19:8** and **Revelation 19:14** actually point toward the church descending with Jesus, clothed in white linen riding on white horses as part of His army coming to earth.

**Reason #7** – If the rapture and second coming of Christ were to occur simultaneously, there would be a contradiction between the resurrection of **Revelation 20:41**, which happens after the rapture, and the resurrection of **1 Thessalonians 4:16**, which happens before the rapture.

In case you are wondering about the resurrections, John refers to the resurrection of the tribulation saints at the beginning of the millennium as “the first resurrection” (**Revelation 20:5**) simply to differentiate it from the resurrection of the wicked at the end of the millennium. It is therefore only first in the sense that it comes before the final resurrection.

**Reason #8** – The New Testament gives believers warnings about personal persecution, but there is a noticeable absence of warnings to the church regarding the impending time of tribulation.

There are warnings against false doctrines and false prophets (**Acts 20:29-30; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1-3**), there is warnings against ungodly living (**Ephesians 4:25-5:7; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; Hebrews 12:1**) and warnings against present tribulation of persecution (**1 Thessalonians 2:14-16; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Peter**), but no warnings of preparing to survive through the judgement wrath of God.

In case you’re wondering that perhaps there is no warnings about preparing for the judgement wrath because you may think that the reason is that God will protect those during that time, let me remind you that **Revelation 13:15** states that the false prophet will have power to kill all who refuse to worship the image of the beast.

It is worth noting that **Revelation 7** indicates that multitudes will be martyred and saved out of the tribulation period.

**Reason #9** – The Bible specifically directs the church to comfort itself in the hope of the rapture, not fear or preparation for the time of tribulation and “wrath of the Lamb” (**Revelation 6:16-17**).

**John 14:1-3** says “*Let not your hearts be troubled*. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” (ESV)

**1 Thessalonians 5:9-11** says “*For God has not destined us for wrath*, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep

we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” (ESV)

As a pastor, I have seen those with a belief in the pre-trib rapture carry a sense of peace similar to a belief in the grace of Christ versus the legalistic approach to religion. It has been my observation that post-tribulationists are more apt to volunteer criticism of pre-tribulation views.

**Reason #10** – The Bible specifically admonishes the church in being ready because the return of Christ is imminent.

There is an urgency in the Bible about the soon return of our Lord and Savior, like **Revelation 21:20**, ‘Behold I come quickly’ and this is an immanency that is lost on the post-trib believer because they are at least 7 years away from that return

Only the pre-trib believer can honestly say “Jesus may come today!” and only the pre-trib believer can genuinely find the rapture their ultimate “blessed hope” unless one is longing to go through the great tribulation, first.

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