

Building A Case For The Pre-Trib Rapture

Lesson #25

Answering The Critics

July 20, 2022

Purpose: To Show:

Christians have believed in a rapture for a long time.

Earliest Christians believed in the imminent return of Christ.

Multiple illustrations of belief in the pre-trib rapture prior to 1830.

The term "rapture" is in the Bible.

The Bible has examples of a person being "raptured."

Doctrine of Imminence is clear in the Bible.

Thomas Ice: "We need to deal with the history of the rapture not because it is a basis for determining truth, which can be found in Scripture alone, but because these issues are often at the heart of the criticisms brought against the pretribulation view."

Criticism: The concept of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture is too new to be true.

A. The Margaret MacDonald Origin

One of the most widely circulated attacks against the pre-trib rapture is the notion that a girl named Margaret MacDonald started this theological view in 1830. The claim is typically made that MacDonald received a demonic vision, passed it on to John Darby [1800-1882], who in turn popularized it. Disproving this assertion proves rather easy.

Pre-trib scholars have discovered a host of rapture writings that predate Margaret MacDonald. However, pre-trib opponents continue to pump out publications that cite MacDonald as the originator of the pre-trib rapture teaching.

B. None of the Church Fathers believed in a Rapture that was separate and apart from The Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Definition of "Church Fathers: All the true Fathers of the Church definitely believed in a Rapture that was distinct from the Second Coming.

- Jesus taught the Rapture in John 14:1-6
- the Apostle Paul wrote about it in I Thess. 4; I Cor. 15
- the Apostle Peter described the principle of it II Peter 2:4-9
- The Apostle John does not mention the Church being on earth during the Tribulation Revelation 6-18

Early Church Fathers' spoke of the "imminent coming of Christ to help them escape from great tribulation." The imminent coming of Christ is a central argument for the Pre-Trib view.

1. The Shepherd of Hermas 96 - 150 AD - 1900 years ago, wrote,

"Watch for your life's sake...Be ready, for ye know not the hour in which our Lord cometh."

"Go, therefore, and tell the elect of the Lord His mighty deeds, and say to them that this beast [Roman Emperor] is a type of the great tribulation that is coming. If then ye prepare yourselves, repent and turn to the Lord, it will be possible for you to escape it."

➤ The Didache, 16.1, circa AD 120-150

2. Irenaeus - 130-202 AD - Studied under Polycarp who studied under the Disciple John.

1800 years ago, he said, "When in the end the Church shall be suddenly caught up from this, it is said, "There shall be tribulation such as has not been since the beginning neither shall be."

3. Ephraem the Syrian - 306-373 AD - 1600 years ago, he said, "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 sins."

Barnabas (ca.100-105), Papias (ca. 60-130), Justin Martyr (110-195), Irenaeus (120-202), Tertullian (145-220), Hippolytus (ca. 185-236), Cyprian (200-250), and Lactantius (260-330)

- Clement of Rome 35-101 AD Speedily will He come and not tarry.
- Ignatius of Antioch 110 AD Be watchful, possessing a sleepless spirit
- Barnabas 70-130 AD The Day of the Lord is at hand. The Lord is near.
- Justin Martyr 100-165 AD There will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem.

Quote: They were the seeds from which the doctrine of the Pretribulation rapture could be developed.

The Apocalypse of Elijah: written in 3rd century about the end times.

Francis Gumerlock, professor of historical theology, says this is an "early example of the rapture before judgment. As new literary finds are discovered, we are becoming aware that pre-tribulationism has a much broader history than its articulations over the last 200 years."

Statements from the text:

- Describes living believers being removed from the wrath and taken to heaven where the lawless one will have no power over them.
- The purpose of the rapture is "specifically removal from the wrath of the Antichrist and escape from the tribulation sent on the world by God in the last days."

Note: Gumerlock points to several early medieval writers who believed that "true Christians would be raptured to heaven before the great fiery conflagration prior to the millennium."

Pseudo-Ephraem: Syrian church father [4th to 7th century]

"We ought to understand thoroughly therefore, my brothers, what is imminent...and prepare ourselves for the meeting of the Lord Jesus Christ...For all the saints and elect of God are gathered together before the tribulation, which is to come, and are taken to the Lord."

Origen of Alexandria [185-254 AD] is considered the Father of Allegorical Teaching of Scripture. The African theologian, who took an allegorical approach to Scripture was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy. He did not believe in the eternal suffering of sinners in Hell. He believed all created beings, even demons and the devil, would eventually achieve salvation, no matter how long it took in the current life or the life to come. He reasoned that because God's love is so powerful, it will eventually soften even the hardest heart.

When Augustine [354-430] began spiritualizing the Bible, his view of a non-literal interpretation took hold of the Church until the Renaissance, 1400-1600 AD, obliterating the Premillennial and Pre-Tribulation Rapture views in favor of Amillennialism [NO millennium]. The Catholic Church endorsed Augustine's concept of Amillennialism around 400 AD. ALL discussion of end time prophecy became taboo. They pictured only ONE return of Jesus at the end of the Church Age.

➤ You either accepted Amillennialism or you were burned at the stake with your writings.

Consider: How could there be any development of eschatology [study of end times] prior to the Reformation which began in 1517? During the Middle Ages, most people could not read, printed Bibles did not exist, nor were there translations available in the common languages.

Once people obtained printed Bibles in their own languages, they quickly realized that the Amillennial view of the Catholic Church was based upon a spiritualization of the Scriptures. That's when a revival of the Premillennial view occurred because it is based upon the plain sense meaning of the Bible's prophecies. That is also when Bible students began to notice that the Rapture is an event that is separate from the Second Coming.

Note: The late development of the Pre-Trib Rapture concept should not be a surprise to anyone because the Scriptures themselves tell us that end time Bible prophecy will not be understood until the time comes for its fulfillment. For example, the prophet Daniel did not understand the end time prophecies that were given to him.

Dan. 12:4, 9 But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.

Many end time prophecies are being understood today for the first time because their fulfillment depended on either historical developments such as the re-establishment of the state of Israel or technological inventions such as the atomic bomb and satellite television.

The chains of allegorical interpretation began to fall off, beginning with the Reformation in the 1400's and 1500's.

Many men began to write of the Rapture occurring separate from the Second Coming. Joseph Mede (1586-1638), Increase Mather (1639-1723), Peter Jurieu (1637-1713), Philip Doddridge (1702- 1751), John Gill (1697-1771), James Macknight (1721-1800), Thomas Scott (1747-1821) and Morgan Edwards (1722-1795) William Witherby wrote about the Rapture in 1818.

Key Point: All these men were precursors to John Darby in support of the Rapture.

These examples do not prove that pre-tribulation is correct, but it is no longer credible for scholars to state that the pre-tribulation rapture was not taught before Darby.

Pre-tribulation was most fully developed by J. N. Darby in the nineteenth century, but it is not entirely absent from church history as some have claimed.

The truth of pre-tribulation must ultimately rest on its Scriptural basis, not on its antiquity, origin, or popularity in church history.

Criticism: The Term "Rapture" Is Not In The Bible

The N.T. was written in Greek. The earliest Greek texts used the Greek word "harpazo."

➤ Harpazo = to seize or be extracted by force

The Greek was translated into Latin. The only Bible used in most civilizations for 1200 years was the Latin Vulgate. The term Rapture, is derived from the Latin word, *rapere*, rapturo, which appears in this Bible. The word "rapere" was translated into several English phrases.

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|---------------------|-------------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Take it by force | Matt. 11:12 | 2. Catcheth Away | Matt. 13:19 |
| 3. Pluck them out | John 10:28 | 4. Caught Up | I Thess. 4:17>NAS; KJ;
NIV |
| | | | 5. Gather Together Eph.
1:10 |

You can call it the pre-trib rapture, the pre-trib rapturo, or the pre-trib caught up!

Consider: The Bible has several examples of believers being "caught or snatched up."

The idea of a miraculous rapture of God's people has a precedence in the Old Testament.

1. Enoch: The first record of a person being caught or snatched up.

Gen. 5:24 And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.

➤ Enoch was taken out of this world and brought into the presence of God.

➤ Took him = laqach= same word used in translation of Elijah

Heb. 11:5 By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

Key Point: Enoch escaped the coming judgment of the flood upon the whole world.

➤ His rapture foreshadows the rapture of Christ's Church.

➤ The Church will escape the judgment of the tribulation period upon the whole world.

2. Elijah: After his miraculous victory over the false prophets at Mt. Carmel, Elijah fled to the desert and hid in a cave to escape those who were ordered to kill him. [I Kings 19:1-9]

➤ While in the cave, God called Elijah to anoint Elisha as his successor I Kings 19:16

➤ Elijah left the cave, found Elisha, and threw his mantle on him. I Kings 19:19

➤ For about 10 years, they ministered together.

II Kings 2:1 And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.

II Kings 2:11-12a And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. ¹² And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more:

Consider: Elijah had performed the Lord's will as a prophet in Israel and had finished his work which was left to Elisha.

- Elijah had been told to anoint Hazael as king of Syria and Jehu as king of Israel.
- However, it was Elisha who carried out the prophet's mandate and anointed the 2 kings.

Key Point: It seems Elijah's example of being "caught up" was a blessing rewarded for his service to the Lord. This foreshadows one of the purposes of the future pre-trib rapture.

- Believers will not only escape God's wrath of the tribulation, they will also receive the blessing of following the Lord.

Rapture of the 2 Witnesses: Rev. 11:3-12

- God will grant 2 Jewish men authority to witness and prophesy for the first 3½ years of the 7 year Tribulation period.
- At the end of the 3½ years, the beast, Antichrist, will kill the 2 witnesses and leave their dead bodies in the streets of Jerusalem for 3½ days.
- The people of the world will celebrate their death.
- The 2 witnesses will return to life after 3½ days, causing great fear among the people.
- They will follow the Lord's command to "come up here," and they will be raptured to heaven.
- Afterwards, a great earthquake will destroy 1/10 of Jerusalem, killing 7,000 people.
- Those who remain will glorify God.

Key Point: Notice the sequence:

1. The 2 witnesses will ascend into heaven when the Lord says, "Come."
2. Their enemies will remain on the earth.
3. Judgment will follow.

Note: This pattern supports the chronology presented in the pre-trib rapture view.

Thomas Ice: Churches often neglect the study and preaching of Biblical prophecy because they consider it a controversial and impractical topic. At the same time, many bemoan the apathy of believers and struggle to encourage people toward holy living. Churches caught in this trap need to consider the teaching of the Rapture, woven throughout the fabric of the New Testament, addresses these issues and can provide motivation for the pursuit of godliness.

Doctrine of Imminence

One of the most powerful arguments for a Pre-Tribulation Rapture is the imminent return of Christ for His Church.

Imminence: Something important is likely to happen and could do so without delay. While it may not be immediate nor necessarily soon, it is next on the program and may take place at any time. It is the next expectation. There is no required intervening event.

The term imminence normally implies three important truths concerning our Lord's coming:

1. While no one knows the time of Christ's return, He may come at any moment and it is possible that He might come today. In the midst of all the trials and sorrows of life, it is the hope of Christ's imminent return which never fails to encourage the troubled heart.
2. The Rapture is sign-less and will be unannounced and largely unexpected.
3. No clearly prophesied event must transpire prior to the Rapture, for this might date the time of His coming. If the return of Christ for His Church is imminent, then obviously it will be before the coming period of Tribulation with its clearly predicted signs and judgments.

➤ In theological language, the Rapture of the Church must be Pre-tribulational.

Objection to Imminence: Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Acts 1:5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

- This event would need to happen before the rapture.
- Therefore, the rapture could not be at any moment.

Key Point: The primary passages given regarding the rapture were given AFTER the Pentecost event.

➤ I Thess. 4:13-18 was written about 51 AD, approximately 20 years AFTER Pentecost.

Many distinctions exist between the Rapture & The Second Coming

Rapture	Second Coming
Translation of Church Believers	No translation of anyone
Translated Saints Go To Heaven	Translated Saints Return To Earth
Earth Not Judged	Earth Judged & Righteousness Established
Imminent, at any moment, signless	Follows Definite Predicted Signs, Including The Tribulation
Not in the Old Testament	Predicted Often in the Old Testament
Believers Only	Affects All Men
Before the Day of Wrath	Concludes the Day of Wrath
No Reference To Satan	Satan Bound
Christ Comes For His Own	Christ Comes With His Own
Jesus Comes In The Air	Jesus Comes To The Earth
Jesus Claims His Bride	Jesus Comes With His Bride
Only His Own See Him	Every Eye Shall See Him
Tribulation Begins	Millennial Kingdom Begins

Thomas Ice: The distinctions between Christ's coming in the air to rapture His church are too great to be reduced into a single coming at the end of the tribulation.

Biblical Passages That Address Imminence

4 Criteria For Passages:

1. Speaks of Christ's return as at any moment.
2. Speaks of Christ's return as near, without giving any signs preceding His coming.
3. Speaks of Christ's return as something that gives believers hope and encouragement. It does not indicate that these believers will suffer tribulation.
4. Speaks of Christ's return as giving hope without relating it to God's judgment of man.

1st Clear Mention & Promise of the Rapture:

Note: There is NO mention of Jesus coming to earth as He will do at His 2nd Coming.

John 14:1-3 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

² In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 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. [Purpose> Take Believers to Heaven]

1. Jesus says He will come back at any future moment.
2. No signs are mentioned, except that Jesus will first leave which is a requirement for Him to return later.
3. Jesus clearly indicates His return will be a time of hope.
4. His future coming takes place without any reference to God's judgment on man.

I Thess. 4:13-18 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

¹⁵ For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

¹⁶ 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:

¹⁷ Then we which are alive [Paul includes himself] and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

¹⁸ Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

J.B. Smith: There is a definite tie between:

John 14:1-3		I Thess. 4:13-18	
Trouble	v. 1	Sorrow	v. 13
Believe	v. 1	Believe	v. 14
God, me	v. 1	Jesus, God	v. 14
Told you	v. 2	Say to you	v. 15
Come again	v. 3	Coming of the Lord	v. 15
Receive you	v. 3	Caught up	v. 17
To myself	v. 3	To meet the Lord	v. 17
Be where I am	v. 3	Ever be with the Lord	v. 17

Observe: The words or phrases are almost an exact parallel. They follow one another in both passages in exactly the same order. Only the righteous are dealt with in each case.

There is not a single irregularity in the progression of words from first to last. Either column takes the believer from the troubles of earth to the glories of heaven. It is consistent to interpret each passage as dealing with the same event—the rapture of the church.

Note: A post-tribulation rapture demands that the saints meet Christ in the air and immediately descend to earth without experiencing what the Lord promised in John 14. Since John 14 refers to the rapture, only a pre-tribulation rapture satisfies the language of John 14:1-3 and allows raptured saints to dwell for a meaningful time with Christ in His Father's house.

I Thess. 1:9-10 For they themselves report about us as to the kind of reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is*, Jesus who rescues us from the wrath to come.

1. Jesus will return at some unknown future time.
2. Paul implies Jesus will return quickly.
3. Christ's return is clearly something believers are to anticipate with joy.

We do not need to linger in fear but serve the Lord in eager anticipation of His coming.

4. His coming will be without judgment. He will rescue us from the wrath to come.

I Thess. 5:4, 8-11 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

⁹ For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

¹¹ Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

1. The Day will come quickly like a thief.
2. His coming is near. Be alert.
3. His coming will provide salvation or rescue. Anticipate His coming with joy.
4. His coming will offer salvation and escape from the coming wrath.

Titus 2:13 Looking for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ;

1. Paul appears to anticipate Jesus coming at any time.
2. He looks forward to the rapture taking place without expecting any additional events to occur beforehand.
3. The rapture is called "the Blessed Hope." It is an encouraging event.
4. There is no judgment associated with this event.

I John 3:2-3 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.

³ And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.

1. Implies the rapture will take place any moment since "everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself."
2. No preceding signs are mentioned.
3. The coming rapture is a time of hope and encouragement.
4. No judgments are connected with this coming. Only positive statements.

Rev. 22:7, 12, 20 Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

1. Jesus makes it clear 3 times: "I am coming quickly."
context: "the words of the prophecy of this book" = the events of Revelation
Jesus speaks of His return as imminent.
2. Though many signs are explained in Revelation, NONE of them have to be fulfilled before Jesus comes. John writes: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."
3. The fact of the Lord's imminent return brought great hope to John.
4. Though Revelation has great detail about God's judgments, these 3 verses anticipate the positive aspects of what is to come.
This supports the idea of the rapture taking place before the 7 year tribulation period.

Consider: The major Second Coming passages provide details of many events which must happen before Jesus returns to the earth, defeats His enemies and sets up His Millennial Kingdom.

Zech. 14:1-12; Matt. 24:4-34; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-27; Rev. 19

All of Revelation 6-18 must happen before His 2nd Coming.

- This makes the Second Coming of Christ non-imminent.

1. Are we to look first for an invasion of the Holy Land by Russia or some other northern confederation?
2. Are we to look for the revelation of Antichrist and his godless ambitions?
3. Are we to look for the predicted Battle of Armageddon with its vast devastation?

Key Point: The Church is admonished to watch for Jesus. [I Thess. 5:6; Titus 2:13; Rev. 3:3]
The Church is not told to watch for any signs.

Believers Are Taught To Expect The Savior From Heaven Any Moment

We are exhorted to be looking for the coming of Christ from heaven to take His own to the Father's house [John 14:1-3]. The Bible calls this our "blessed hope."

Titus 2:13 Looking for that Blessed Hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ;

Phil. 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for THE Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

I Thess. 5:6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.

I Peter 1:13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

The Doctrine Of Imminence Should Have A Definite Bearing On Your Christian Walk.

➤ Think back over this past week.

How much of what you did was motivated by your conscious awareness of the coming of the Lord?