

Eschatology  
The Study of End Times  
Part 3

A. The two aspects of Jesus's Second Coming

1. The Bible declares over and over that Jesus will come again and it describes two aspects or stages to His coming:
  - a. The first is referred to as the **RAPTURE** of the Church:
    - 1) The English word “rapture” doesn’t appear in the Bible; it’s a Latin translation of the Greek work harpazo which means to be seized, caught up, or snatched away
    - 2) It’s used in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (READ)
    - 3) It’s used in a nearly identical way in three other places:
      - a) The Spirit of the Lord snatching Philip away after he shared the Gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:39 (READ)
      - b) Paul being caught up into heaven in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 (READ)
      - c) The book of Revelation also used it to refer to Christ’s ascension (Revelation 12:5)
    - 4) When this occurs, Paul wrote that it will happen in an instant—the “**twinkling of an eye**”—and two things will happen (READ 1 Corinthians 15:52):
      - a) The first is those who previously died in Christ will be raised up
      - b) The second is that those who are still alive will be “**changed**” meaning that their perishable, earthly bodies will be changed to imperishable, glorified bodies
    - 5) This was likely what Jesus was referring to in John 14 (READ John 14:1-3)
    - 6) So, the rapture is when Jesus appears in the sky to snatch up believers (dead and alive) and take us to His Father’s house in Paradise
  - a. The second stage is called Jesus’ **RETURN** or His **REVEALING** (some also reserve the phrase 2<sup>nd</sup> coming to just refer to this second stage, but that’s confusing)
    - a. At His return, Jesus comes to judge the earth and take His place as King and rightful heir of David’s kingdom (READ Matthew 25:31-46)
    - a. Jesus told His disciples in Luke 22:29-30, “...**just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**”
    - b. As Revelation 20:4 reveals, this refers to the millennial kingdom: “**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.**”
3. So, the question is, When will each of these happen?
  - a. When it comes to the second stage—His RETURN—the Bible is very specific:
    - 1) Once Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week begins, the Bible gives us a list of events, and even the number of days, that lead right up to the time of Jesus’ return
    - 2) We may not know in advance when Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week will begin, but once it starts we will know

- b. When it comes to the rapture, however, the Bible is less specific about the timing:
  - 1) The Bible describes the rapture in at least 20 different passages, but it's not nearly as specific in regard to the timing as it is the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming
  - 2) Jesus said of the events that surround the rapture, **"but of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone"** (Mark 13:32)
  - 3) We know it's related to Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week, but trying to determine whether it's before, during, or after is something the Church has wrestled with for 2000 years
  - 4) This leads us to a discussion of the different views of the timing of the rapture

B. Four Views of the Rapture
------------------------------

1. Post-Tribulation (probably the most common because of its popularity among non-evangelical denominations)
  - a. Tenants:
    - 1) No separate rapture; it happens simultaneously with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming at the end of the 7 years of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week (a yo-yo rapture; we go up and come right back down)
    - 2) All seven years are Satan's wrath, not God's
    - 3) Church is on earth the entire seven years, but is protected by God
    - 4) The Day of the Lord/God's wrath is a literal 24-hour day that occurs simultaneously with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming
  - b. Problems:
    - 1) This view sees all seven years as Satan's wrath, but the Bible is clear that at least part of the second half involves God's wrath and the Day of the Lord
    - 2) Another major problem with this view is something it shares with the mid-trib view; we can know when the rapture will happen contrary to what Jesus said; once the 70<sup>th</sup> week begins, we know the rapture will happen exactly seven years later
    - 3) A final problem is that if the rapture happens at the end, who will populate the millennial kingdom since all believers will be raptured and the unsaved sent to hell? There will be no non-glorified people to go into the kingdom
2. Mid-Tribulation (least popular):
  - a. Tenants:
    - 1) The first half of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week is Satan's wrath
    - 2) The second half, which begins with the abomination of desolation, is the Day of the Lord and the wrath of God
    - 3) Right in the middle of these, at the abomination of desolation, the Church is raptured
  - b. Problems:
    - 1) The main problem is that we know exactly when the mid-point of the seven years is so if the rapture happens then, we can know exactly when the rapture takes place, contrary to what Jesus Himself said
    - 2) Another problem is that Jesus reveals in the Olivet Discourse that believers here on earth during Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week will face persecution from the anti-christ AFTER the mid-point and the abomination of desolation; how does that happen if they are raptured?
    - 3) The other main problem is that there just isn't much Biblical support for it which might explain why it's the least popular view

3. Pre-Tribulation—most common/popular view in evangelical circles (esp. since the Left Behind books were published in the mid 90s)
  - a. Tenants:
    - 1) The rapture happens before Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week begins and the Church spends the entire time with Jesus in heaven, and then returns to the earth with Him after the end
    - 2) All seven years of Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week are viewed as God’s wrath
    - 3) Immanency: there are no prophesied events left to be fulfilled or signs before the rapture can happen; Jesus can return at any time
    - 4) The rapture will be secret (not seen by the world)
  - b. Problems:
    - 1) Doctrine of Immanence:
      - a) One issue with immanence is that the Bible gives at least four signs or events that have to be fulfilled before the Day of the Lord which begins with the Rapture (READ Luke 17:22-37 and note the repletion of “on that day”):
        - The arrival of Elijah the prophet (or someone in the stead of Elijah; READ Malachi 4:5)
        - The apostasy of the Church (READ 2 Thessalonians 2:3a)
        - The man of lawlessness (Beast/antichrist) being revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:3b)
        - Supernatural celestial signs (READ Joel 2:31)
      - b) Another issue with the doctrine of immanence is that we don’t find any evidence for it in the writing of the early Church fathers:
        - In fact, the church fathers who wrote on the subject of the end times universally wrote that the rapture wouldn’t happen until after the abomination of desolation, the revealing of the antichrist, and his severe persecution of the saints
        - Some pre-trib proponents falsely claim the opposite by quoting select statements that sort-of sound pre-trib, but they generally ignore the statements that clearly contradict a pre-trib view
        - There are some rather ambiguous statements made by commentators in the 1600s and 1700s that might be seen as supporting pre-trib, but most historians recognize that it was first proposed by John Nelson Darby in a formal sense in the 1830s
      - c) A final issue with immanence is that none of the passages that pretribulationists use to prove immanency are really about immanence:
        - For instance, the example of Jesus coming like a thief in the night from Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 5 is often cited, but those verses aren’t teaching that nothing comes before the rapture and that Jesus can come back at any time
        - In fact, in both passages Jesus and Paul give signs to look for and events that must happen before the rapture!
        - The passages are describing not immanence, but the suddenness of the rapture when it does come—and those are two different things
        - Jesus likens it to labor pains; you have a general idea of when they are coming because you know the signs and what has to proceed them (9 months of

pregnancy, weight gain, discomfort, restlessness, etc.), but when the labor pains start, they start suddenly

- The main focus of all of the so-called immanence passages isn't that there are no prophetic events or signs that must occur before the rapture, but rather that we should be cognizant of the signs and therefore looking for it and prepared for it when it happens

- 2) Another problem with the pre-trib view is philosophical and theological and has to do with persecution and suffering:
  - a) The pre-tribulation view is based on the premise that believers shouldn't have to suffer the events that we see in Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week
  - b) But, aside from the portion that deals with God's wrath, for the entire history of the Church, Christians have suffered most if not all of the things described in the first ¾ of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week
  - c) In addition, the book of Revelation records saints suffering and being martyred for their faith during most of the seven years
  - d) The Bible warns believers about such suffering; we even have entire letters written about it (1 & 2 Peter for instance)
  - e) The question I always want to ask is, why do Christians today believe they should be spared the wrath of the anti-christ (through the rapture) when millions of Christians around the world for the past 2000 years were not spared horrific persecution and death?

4. Pre-Wrath (growing view, especially among evangelicals and former pretribulationists):

a. Tenants:

- 1) Like the mid-trib and post-trib views, the Church is present through much of the seven years but raptured immediately before God pours out His wrath upon the earth
- 2) However, while the mid- and post-trib views give a specific time for the rapture (mid-point vs. end), pre-wrath doesn't specify a time, only that it happens sometime after the Great Tribulation and the beginning of God's wrath (generally, between the sixth and seventh seals)
- 3) In this view, the first 3.5 years is Satan's reign, followed by the abomination of desolation at the mid-point; the second half then begins with the Great Tribulation and the antichrist's increased persecution of Israel and the Church; after an undetermined period of time, God cuts the Great Tribulation short, raptures the Church and begins to pour out His wrath (which extends 30 days beyond the seven years)

b. Problems:

- 1) The main complaint against this view is that Jesus is the one who opens all the seven seals in Revelation chapters 5-8, which critics argue proves the entire 7 years is God's wrath, not Satan's
- 2) Another problem often cited is that the word Church is only mentioned in the first three chapters of Revelation which is prior to the start of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week; it's argued that since the word Church is never mentioned anywhere else in the book, it must be absent from the entire seven years
- 3) A final complaint often leveled against this view, is that it's a relatively new view:
  - a) Back in the 1970s, a man named Robert Van Kampen was the first to formalize the view and give it the name pre-wrath

- b) Then, in 1990, Marvin Rosenthal, who was the head of the popular Friends of Israel ministry, published a book on the view (and was subsequently booted from the ministry as a result)
- c) One of the most well-known proponents today is Dr. Alan Kurshner, a Greek linguistic and Biblical hermeneutics expert
- d) Personally, I think discounting this view because it's "new" is a weak argument:
  - What would have happened if the Church ignored Martin Luther's assertion that salvation is by grace through faith simply because it was considered new?
  - In reality, it wasn't actually new because it was the view of the early church; it had simply been forgotten for over 1000 years
  - The same can be said of the pre-wrath view

Conclusion
------------

\*\*Where do I currently stand?

1. For most of my Christian life I considered myself pre-trib, but more by default than conviction; it's what I was taught; my mentor is pre-trib; I went to a pre-trib seminary and was ordained in a pre-trib fellowship; plus, of the three main views (pre-, mid-, post-), pre-trib seemed to have the fewest problems
2. Even as I did my own study, I started with a pre-trib bias and interpreted the end-times passages through that lens, even when doing so forced me to have to "bend" some of the normal rules of interpretation
3. When I was first introduced to the pre-wrath view over a decade ago, I rejected it outright without giving it much of an evaluation; mostly because it was "new" and didn't have much support among evangelical scholar (who were almost universally pre-trib)
4. However, since then I've grown more uncomfortable with the interpretive gymnastics needed to support the pre-trib view, looking at the end-times passages with a new set of eyes, and ultimately gravitating toward a pre-wrath view
5. I feel pretty confident that I can rule out the mid-trib and post-trib views because they are the weakest views Biblically
6. That pretty much leaves the pre-trib and pre-wrath views, but I feel the weight of the Biblical evidence better supports the pre-wrath view in my opinion
7. So, next week I'd like to lay out a case for the pre-wrath view