

## Chapter 14 - A Rapture or the Second Coming?

Author: Larry W. Wilson

***"Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."***

– Matthew 24:40-42

### Six Apocalyptic Prophecies

There are **six apocalyptic prophecies** in the book of Daniel and they “stack” on top of each other much like the layers of a wedding cake. Each prophecy has a beginning and ending point in time and each prophecy contains an orderly sequence of events. For example, Daniel 2 is the bottom layer or “foundation” prophecy and its time-span reaches from 600 B.C. to the Second Coming.

The second apocalyptic prophecy ( Daniel 7) stacks on top of Daniel 2 and covers the same time-span as Daniel 2. The third prophecy or layer starts around 538 B.C. and reaches to the Second Coming. The fourth prophecy begins in 457 B.C. and ends with A.D. 33, etc. By layering the prophecies of Daniel on top of each other, God eliminated several problems before they even began! First, when we examine these six layers, a large amount of information unfolds that is otherwise unknown.

By linking the six layers together with prophetic events, God says a great deal with the fewest possible words. This is an important consideration because books of the Old Testament were duplicated by hand for almost 3,000 years. Second, by layering the prophecies on top of each other, God implemented a process which scholars call repetition and enlargement. It allows the Bible student to confidently arrange and define all the prophetic elements within each prophecy.

As each layer of prophecy is added to the “stack,” the underlying layers have to be correctly interpreted and chronologically arranged or the next layer will not make sense. Last, by layering the prophecies, God hid the meaning of these prophecies in the book of Daniel until the time of the end would arrive. ( Daniel 12:4,9)

I believe God did this so the last generation on Earth could quickly understand the fulfillment of 26 centuries of prophecy. In other words, an ordinary person can now understand the sweeping prophetic progression of 26 centuries with just a few hours of study.

Now that the layering of the prophecies has been discovered, people can determine which elements of apocalyptic prophecy are in the past and which are forthcoming! A brief discussion about the six layers in Daniel has been presented because of this statement: “The six prophecies of Daniel do not support the idea of a pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation rapture of the saints.”

There are twelve apocalyptic prophecies in the book of Revelation and these also “stack” on top of each other just like the six layers do in the book of Daniel. Even more, the twelve layers of Revelation harmoniously align with the six apocalyptic prophecies in Daniel. When all eighteen prophecies are viewed together, there is one marvelous prophetic story that unfolds in chronological order.

All eighteen prophecies are interconnected. Each layer has a starting point in time and an ending point in time, and the events in each prophecy (or layer) occur in the chronological order given.

When a person understands how past fulfillment of prophecy conform to this well-defined architecture, it is possible to determine with some certainty the chronological timing within God’s prophetic plans. It is important to understand that the chronological layers of Daniel and Revelation do not support a pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation rapture.

When the eighteen layers of apocalyptic prophecy are arranged correctly, the progressive fulfillment of prophecy is confirmed by recorded history. This occurs because apocalyptic prophecy produces a chronological “time-line” showing past, present and future events. A knowledge of this time-line prevents a misapplication of end-time statements that occur throughout the Bible.

For example, the opening text for this chapter ( Matthew 24:40-42) is often used by proponents of the pre-tribulation rapture to justify a sudden snatching away of people from Earth.

There are two problems with this assertion. First, the chronological order of Daniel and Revelation does not support a pre-tribulation rapture and second, the context itself does not mandate a pre-tribulation rapture. If a person has the notion of a pre-tribulation rapture *already in mind*, Matthew 24:40-42 can be presented in a way that makes it appear to support a pre-tribulation rapture.

Before a sincere Bible student draws a conclusion, efforts should be made to reconcile many texts that are not in harmony with a pre-tribulation rapture. We need to ask, can we “pick and choose” texts that only favor our notions and ignore those we do not understand or like?

Truth is found in the harmony that comes from the sum of all its parts. There is an explanation for Matthew 24:40-42 that harmoniously aligns with the chronological order given in Daniel and Revelation, as well as all the other texts that do not harmonize with the doctrine of a pre-tribulation rapture.

## **The New World Order**

The world stands at the door of a great transition. The nations of Earth as we currently know them, are about to undergo a radical change. I am not describing another world order based on political realignment. Political realignment has been an ongoing process ever since nations came into existence.

Instead, I am describing the destruction of earthly nations and the creation of a *new world* whose order God will establish.

The Bible is the *only* source of truth on this subject and it is the only book that contains a comprehensive road map of soon coming events. The Bible is the only authority that speaks for God on this matter. For these reasons, people should carefully consider the prophecies in Daniel and Revelation.

The people of Earth need to understand that the Most High God is about to bring this world of sin to an end.

Many people sense that something big is about to happen and indeed, something very big is about to happen. Jesus is going to startle billions of people with an enormous demonstration of divine authority.

Confusion, mayhem and extreme suffering will be everywhere and a trustworthy road map explaining the forthcoming actions of Jesus will be indispensable.

Although the road map of Bible prophecy does not reveal a pretty picture for the immediate future, it does provide the light of eternal hope shining through a short, but very dark tunnel. For this reason, the information contained in the Bible should receive our highest attention.

After investigating Bible prophecy for many years, I am convinced that whether we agree or disagree with the events described in Bible prophecy, man's opinions do not affect God or His actions.

He will do what He has said He will do. What we may believe about God has nothing to do with God's behavior – all that He has predicted will come to pass.

Therefore, it is imperative that we approach Bible prophecy from an honest perspective for the purpose of understanding the ways of God. The Father has put Jesus in control of closing events.

With this thought in mind, let us consider what the Bible has to say about the Second Coming and the concept of a pre-tribulation rapture.

## **Views on the Rapture**

Protestants basically support one of four views about the gathering of the saints. Many Protestants believe in a pre-tribulation rapture. A smaller, but significant number, believe in a mid-tribulation rapture (e.g., Christians are taken to Heaven midway through the seventieth week of seven years).

A third group of Protestants believe in a pre-wrath rapture (e.g., Christians are taken to Heaven just before the outpouring of the seven last plagues). Last, a minority of Protestants believes in

a post-tribulation gathering of the saints at the Second Coming.

The concept of a rapture (regardless of timing) is a complicated study because so many ideas are involved. In fact, the study of Bible prophecy is a lot like weaving a potholder out of many pieces of colored yarn. Small pieces of yarn are not very strong or important by themselves.

However, if a person weaves the yarn together just right, the result can be an attractive and durable potholder.

The same is true with the study of prophecy. Eventually, every student of prophecy ends up creating his or her own "prophetic potholder" out of the yarn given to him or her! (Sorry for the pun.)

As so often happens, many rush out to assure others about the superiority of their potholder and the weakness of all others. (If this topic was not so serious, I would find this entire process, which also includes my work, to be amusing.)

The object of owning a potholder is to keep from getting burned and a parallel can be drawn for a prophetic potholder as well. (Again, sorry for the pun.) Each week I receive multi-page letters from people who assure me that I am totally wrong because my prophetic potholder could not possibly come from a logical study of God's Word.

My standard response (defense?) is that the arrangement of the yarn makes the difference! Be assured, time will confirm all that God has said. *Nothing* but the passage of time can confirm how close or how far we are from rightly interpreting God's Word.

With that said, however, I want you to know right up front that even when I put the chronological order of Daniel and Revelation aside for a moment, there are numerous scriptural reasons why I cannot accept the doctrine of a pre-tribulation rapture. Let me address a few of these issues:

## **Just One Gathering of the Saints!**

Some Christians say the righteous dead do not participate in the pre-tribulation rapture and others say the righteous dead are included. What does the Bible say?

When are the righteous dead resurrected? Jesus said, **"And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."** ( John 6:39,40)

When does "the last day" occur? Does it occur at the *beginning* of the 70th week (of seven years)?

No! Paul wrote, **"According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen**

asleep.

For the Lord himself will come down from Heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever." (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)

These verses contain four important points:

- a. The living do not precede the dead to Heaven.
- b. Jesus Himself will come down from Heaven.
- c. He will call the righteous dead to life with a loud command.
- d. As the dead ascend, the living will join with them to meet Jesus in the air.

Look again at the text. Paul says, "**After that** [e.g., resurrection of the righteous], **we who are still alive and are left will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.**" Some people distort Paul's words to mean, "after that [the rapture], we who are still alive and are left [behind] will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air [later on at the Second Coming]. . . ." But this is not the meaning of Paul's remarks.

Consider verse 15 again: "**According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.**" Paul states two things: First, the living *will not precede* the dead to Heaven.

The two groups meet the Lord at the same time. Second, Paul refers to individuals who are alive at the coming of the Lord in the sense that "we" [the living] who are *alive when* the Lord appears will unite with the dead to meet Jesus in the air.

Paul's idea is quite different from being "left behind after a rapture." Review verses 15-17 and notice Paul's use of the pronoun "we." Why does Paul use the inclusive pronoun "we" in these texts? Paul thought that he, with other living believers ("we"), would live to see Christ appear in the clouds and the dead raised from their graves without experiencing death themselves. (1 Corinthians 7:29,30)

Paul did not believe in or teach a pre-Second Coming rapture.

Paul has more to say about the resurrection of the righteous. Notice this text which was written a few years after 1 Thessalonians: "**Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.**" (1 Corinthians 15:51,52, italics mine.)

Did you notice that the Apostle Paul uses the inclusive pronoun "we" three times in this text? He used the third person plural pronoun "we" because he believed that he would live to see Jesus return. Of course, Paul had no idea time would last 2,000 more years.

On the basis of what we have read, the Bible teaches there is one gathering of the saints, both the dead and the living, at the last day. This fact proves the rapture doctrine to be deficient because it requires two gatherings of the saints, one gathering at the beginning of the 70th week and one gathering at the Second Coming.

## When Does the Judgment Occur?

A pre-trib rapture *mandates* a pre-trib judgment *before* the rapture can take place because Jesus has to decide who can be raptured and who cannot. The fact that Jesus judges the people of Earth *before* the Second Coming is well supported in Scripture, but no scriptural support exists for a judgment of *the living before* the Great Tribulation begins.

In fact, I find the opposite to be true. One of the primary purposes of the Great Tribulation is to judge the living. (Revelation 3:10) The contest between obeying God and observing His Ten Commandments versus obeying the Antichrist (the devil) and receiving his mark will separate the people of Earth into one of two camps.

Notice what Jesus says about the Second Coming: **“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left . . . “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”** (Matthew 25:31-46)

Jesus clearly establishes *when* the sheep are separated from the goats. This happens, Jesus said, **“When the Son of Man comes in his glory . . . All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another. They [the wicked] will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”**

In this text, Jesus describes the scene that occurs on the last day, the day when the eternal reward is given. Nothing is said about gathering up His sheep *before* the Second Coming. Nothing is said about granting eternal life to millions of people seven years before the Second Coming.

Notice these verses: **“He [Jesus] answered, ‘The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up**

**and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.’ ” (Matthew 13:37-43)**

These verses conflict with the notion of a pre-trib rapture.

The harvest is the end of the age and we know from an earlier verse (verse 30 ) that the weeds (the wicked) and the good seed (the righteous) grow *together* until the time of the harvest. When the Son of Man sends His angels, they will gather up the good seed and throw the weeds into the fiery furnace.

Nothing is said about sparing the weeds for seven more years after the good seed is taken up to Heaven. [Jesus said] **“As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come [this time] to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at *the last day*.”** (John 12:47-48, insertion mine.)

This may seem strange, but “the last day” issue rises again. Jesus makes an interesting point about *the last day* in these verses. From earlier study we know that “the last day” occurs at the Second Coming. Therefore, no one *actually knows* whether he or she is saved or condemned until the Second Coming or the last day.

Keep in mind that I am writing of *knowing*, not about believing. A person may believe he or she is saved or even lost, but faith is not the same thing as knowledge. Hebrews 11:1 (KJV) says, **“Now faith is the substance of things *hoped for*, the evidence of things not seen . . . .”** Knowledge, on the other hand, is a matter of fact.

This is why the tree in Genesis was called “the *knowledge* of good and evil.” Humankind had no knowledge of sin until sin occurred.

God gave instructions about sin (Genesis 2:17) and Adam and Eve knew that sin could occur, but they did not know what sin was. However, once sin was experienced, it became a matter of fact. The point in John 12 is timing: According to Jesus, no one will *know* whether he or she is saved or condemned until the last day which occurs when the righteous are resurrected.

**Righteous people cannot be raptured to Heaven (saved), if the rest of the living have not been condemned to death yet!**

According to the words of Jesus in John 12:47,48, everyone left behind after a rapture would be condemned to eternal death. Notice what Jesus said about His appearing: **“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to *everyone* according to what he has done . . . Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who**

**practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”** (Revelation 22:12-15)

John 12 and Revelation 22 are in perfect harmony. When Jesus returns, His reward of salvation or condemnation *is with Him*. When He arrives, all people will have been judged according to their deeds (works, KJV) and Jesus Himself will physically distribute everyone’s reward at His appearing.

Jesus will execute the condemned (the goats, or the wicked) by a single command (the sharp sword that comes out of His mouth). (2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 19:21) The righteous dead will come to life and rise from the Earth upon command (Revelation 1:18), and the righteous living will join the resurrected saints and “fly away” to meet the Lord *in the air* “at the last day. (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

The Bible teaches that the judgment of man takes place *before* rewards are handed out at the last day: **“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”** (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

This verse confirms that God will “pass over” or judge each person that lives on the face of the Earth. He will review every deed during the judgment process and make a determination regarding each person, whether for salvation or condemnation.

If a person lives by faith, then his or her deeds or works will confirm his or her faith. ( James 2:17) This is why we are judged by our works. Notice this confirming verse: **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”** ( 2 Corinthians 5:10)

Did you notice that Paul uses the inclusive pronoun again? **“For we must all appear. . . .”** Paul knew that he too must stand before the judgment seat of Christ. So *everyone*, good and bad, including Protestants believing in a pre-trib rapture, has to stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

The judgment of the *living* occurs during the Great Tribulation. God is going to test the faith and loyalty of the living with tribulation! ( Revelation 3:10)

In fact, this is why God permits the worldwide mark of the beast test to be established – to see who will obey Him and live by faith, even to the point of death.

## The Church at Philadelphia

**“Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from *the hour of trial* that is going to come upon *the whole world to test those who live on the earth.*”** ( Revelation 3:10, italics mine.) This text is often used by pre-trib rapture believers to defend their

escape from the Great Tribulation. So, let us carefully examine this text and its context.

To be fair, if the Bible had one verse in it, and this was its only verse, I could be persuaded that the Bible supported the idea that the saints will escape the hour of trial that is coming upon the whole world. However, when compared with everything the Bible has to say about the end-time, this verse does not actually say what it is purported to say.

This verse was directed to the church at Philadelphia. So, we need to ask, will the church at Philadelphia be *the only* church to escape the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world? I do not believe this to be true.

There are six more churches in Revelation, and we need to discover what happens to them during the Great Tribulation.

Review Revelation 3:10 and observe these two points: First, Jesus says an hour of trial is going to come upon the whole world *to test the living*. For reasons beyond the scope of this study, I agree with pre-trib rapture believers that the Great Tribulation is imminently before us!

I believe this verse points to a final tribulation that has no equal in world history. ( Matthew 24:21; Daniel 12:1,2)

When a person first reads this text it may appear that the church of Philadelphia ( Revelation 3:7) will be kept *from* experiencing the hour of trial, that is, they will escape this testing time. Unfortunately, many Christians have come to regard this verse as proof that Christians will escape the suffering that will overcome the world during the Tribulation.

Actually, this verse does not teach that Christians will be taken to Heaven before the Tribulation begins, but instead indicates that believers will be sustained *beginning from* (Greek word 'ek) the hour of trial until Jesus appears.

One of the world's best lexicons on early Christian use of the Greek language is *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, 1952, Fourth Ed.).

The word in question is the Greek preposition 'ek and it is translated "from" both in the NIV and KJV. Therefore, the phrase reads, ". . . **I will keep you from the hour of trial . . .**" However, this tiny preposition is also translated in a variety of other ways in both versions of the Bible and has more than a dozen different English equivalents in meaning.

For example, 'ek can mean "from, out of, away from, coming out of, descending from, by, because of, beginning from, begins from, for," etc. On page 235 of this lexicon, the authors indicate that when the preposition is followed by a measurement of time – as in "the hour of trial," 'ek can convey the meaning "beginning from."

In other words, a person is justified in reading this verse as follows: "I [Jesus] will also keep you *beginning from* the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world. . . ."

When one word, especially a preposition, determines the meaning of a pivotal verse, we must be very careful in our research. We can and should turn to additional lexicons and other word study helps for insight. Although this effort may be valuable, it is not the highest authority regarding the intended meaning of the verse.

Higher and more weighty evidence must come from the Bible itself. So, here are three points for your consideration about why this verse should be understood as *“beginning from the hour of trial”*:

a. Jesus told His disciples, “. . . **And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age [world (KJV)].**” (Matthew 28:20) This verse should be taken at face value. Jesus plainly said He will be with His children to the very last day when He physically and gloriously appears in the clouds. This idea concurs with Revelation 3:10: “I [Jesus] will also keep you *beginning from the hour of trial* that is going to come upon the whole world. . . .”

b. Several verses in Revelation indicate that the saints are on Earth during the Great Tribulation. The word “saints” is mentioned twelve times in Revelation (NIV) and thirteen times in the KJV. Except for the 144,000 servants who are taken to Heaven after the seven trumpets end and the 24 elders who were taken to Heaven at the time of Christ’s ascension, Revelation does not place the *living* saints in Heaven before the Second Coming. In fact, Revelation places the saints on Earth! Notice what happens to the saints in these verses: **“Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest [the remnant, (KJV)] of her offspring – those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus . . . He [the beast] was given power to make war against the *saints* and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation . . . If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the *saints* . . . .”** ( Revelation 12:17; 13:7; 13:10, italics mine.)

I do not find support in Scripture for the idea that some saints are enjoying the bliss of Heaven while others are living through a hellish tribulation on Earth. Instead, the purpose of the Great Tribulation is to test those people who live on Earth and to expose who the saints really are!

Revelation 14:12 confirms the saints will suffer because they obey God. John says, **“This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who [suffer because they] obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.”**

The point is that Revelation clearly puts the saints on Earth during the Great Tribulation. Therefore, Revelation 3:10 should read, “I [Jesus] will also keep you *beginning from the hour of trial* that is going to come upon the whole world. . . .”

c. Let us review the comments of Jesus to all seven churches. The meaning of Revelation 3:10 will become clearer when placed within its larger context. Does Jesus intend to honor the people in the church at Philadelphia with a pre-trib rapture and punish the other six churches by putting them through the Great Tribulation? Besides, who belongs to the church of Philadelphia today? How can we tell? Study the chart on the following page to see what Jesus says to each

church.

I regard the seven messages to the seven churches as local and timely messages. This means that when these messages were given in A.D. 95, they were directed at seven specific churches that existed in John's day. Therefore, we have to understand these messages within their local situation, their day and time. (Similarly, we have to treat the epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians in the same manner.)

To appreciate the meaning of these messages, put on John's sandals and stand where he stood. I do not find any justification from Scripture revealing that the seven churches represent seven phases of historical development within the Christian church over the past 2,000 years as some people claim.

Neither do I find the message given to the first century church of Philadelphia uniquely applicable to those people who believe in a pre-trib rapture *today*. I do find these seven churches in Asia Minor to be typical of Christians during all ages. Therefore, the messages should not be promoted as apocalyptic prophecy, but as warning and edifying messages for all Christian churches.

Jesus sent timely messages to seven Christian churches that had problems in John's day, so that Christians everywhere could see that Jesus closely observes those people who proclaim His Name. (Incidentally, more than seven Christian churches existed in John's day, but Jesus chose these seven because their corporate behavior represented Christian churches everywhere. The number "7" is often used as a number of "completeness" and therefore, *seven* messages to *seven* churches suggest Jesus' comprehensive analysis of Christian behavior.)

## Specific to Smyrna

Notice how the message to Smyrna is limited to their time-period and locale: **"Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."** ( Revelation 2:10)

The ten days of persecution and the circumstances remain a mystery today. However, the essential question we should ask is why would Jesus allow those people in this church to suffer, even to the point of death, yet spare members in the church at Philadelphia from the Great Tribulation?

Today, if some people belong to the church of Philadelphia, who belongs to the church of Smyrna?

If we apply the same interpretative logic in Revelation 2:10 as pre-trib believers do in Revelation 3:10, then who would want to belong to the church of Smyrna?

## Specific to Philadelphia

In A.D. 95, Christians were suffering oppression from both the Romans and the Jews. All who accepted Jesus Christ as the Son of God were severely persecuted. The Jews hated the Christians because Christians proclaimed all over the world that Judaism was a false religion.

The Romans hated the Christians because Christians would not worship the man-god, Caesar.

The church at Philadelphia had suffered great losses. John himself was on the isle of Patmos because his loyalty to Jesus prevented him from submitting to the demands of Rome. It was not a good time to be a Christian.

Notice how tenderly Jesus spoke to the suffering people in Philadelphia: **“Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.”** ( Revelation 3:10)

In effect, Jesus was commending that local church for their patient endurance because they had suffered for the gospel. He further assured them that He would continue to sustain them during the hour of trial that was coming upon the whole world (not just their city).

No doubt, the Philadelphians were wondering how they could continue to endure additional suffering on a longer or even larger scale.

No doubt they knew about the predicted Great Tribulation mentioned in Daniel, Matthew and Luke, but like us, they did not know exactly when it would begin.

No doubt, they were asking themselves how things could be any worse! I am sure they took the words of Jesus to mean: Hang on! I will continue to sustain you during the hour of trial that will come upon the Earth to test the whole world.

## **Summary on Revelation 3:10**

Tradition teaches that nine or ten of Christ’s disciples were martyrs for their faith. History confirms that millions died for their faith during the Dark Ages. If this is true, then we need to ask ourselves why born again Christians living today, out of all generations, should be spared from the Great Tribulation?

Further, the use of Revelation 3:10 to support a pre-trib rapture of the entire Christian church is simply not justified when we consider the following issues: the timing surrounding the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of the living, the many uses of the Greek preposition ‘ek, Jesus’ promise to be with His disciples until the very end of the age, the earthly location of the saints during the Great Tribulation mentioned in Revelation, and the messages given to the seven churches that were timely and local (especially as related to the church of Philadelphia).

## **The Rapture Doctrine is Not a Testing Doctrine!**

I have a problem with those individuals who make the pre-trib rapture a testing doctrine. Many

Protestants are threatened with eternal loss if they refuse to believe in a pre-trib rapture.

Some people say that if you do not believe in the rapture, you cannot be saved *after* it happens – there is no second chance.

This is interesting, since this position stands in opposition to the basic premise of the pre-trib rapture. Pre-trib advocates teach that sinners will have seven more years (the 70th week) to “get right” with the Lord. So, condemnation for rejecting the rapture has no scriptural support.

When did the rapture doctrine become a testing truth for salvation and who had the authority to establish this test?

The Bible identifies one unpardonable sin ( Matthew 12:31,32) and that sin is not the denial of a pre-trib rapture. This type of threat regarding eternal loss is a form of manipulation. Doctrines that trap and hold uninformed people in a prison of toxic faith should be openly refuted.

We are not living in the Dark Ages. In most countries today, anyone who wants to own and read a Bible can easily obtain one. As you may surmise, I give no credence to the concept that a person could be lost simply by refusing to believe the doctrine of the rapture.

On the contrary, we receive the assurance of salvation ( 1 John 5:12) when we surrender our life to Jesus Christ as Lord and Master.

He is my Shepherd ( Psalm 23). He guides me into all truth through the ministry of the Holy Spirit! ( John 16:13) *I do not trust any pastor, priest or rabbi to tell me what I must believe or what I must do in order to be saved. My duty is to listen to the Holy Spirit.* ( John 3:8)

He brings enlightenment and conviction as I study God’s Word for myself. Yes, I enjoy listening to religious speakers for study and investigation, but when I study, I follow and obey Jesus as the Spirit convicts me. Let no one deceive you in this: Salvation is a personal matter between you and your Savior. ( John 14:21-24; Philippians 2:12,13)

### “One Will be Taken and the Other Left”

One of the favorite texts used by people who believe in a pre-Second Coming rapture is found in Matthew 24:40-42. Jesus said, **“Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. ‘Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.’”**

This verse understandably makes many people nervous. It seems to suggest that the appearing of Jesus will be a sudden and totally unexpected event. On the surface these verses appear to say that two people will be working side by side and poof – one person is taken and the other is left.

Sometimes people who support the pre-trib rapture use these verses to make a sharp

distinction between a sudden, “thief in the night” kind of gathering of the saints, and the glorious resurrection/ascension of the remaining saints mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and Revelation 1:7.

Do these verses really teach a secret gathering of the saints before the Second Coming?

This is only possible if the context in which these words were spoken is totally ignored. So, let us take a close look at the context of these comments:

The setting for Matthew 24 begins as Jesus is leaving the temple. His disciples caught up with Him and they draw His attention to the magnificent buildings that make up the temple complex. The temple was the pride of the Jews. It was their most sacred religious shrine.

Herod had expanded and adorned it with much gold and cedar in an attempt to win the respect and cooperation of the Jews.

The Jews believed that God would not allow His “restored” temple to be desecrated again and the disciples wondered when Jesus would establish His throne and rule from His temple. As Jesus looked upon the gleaming walls of the edifice, a deep sadness overcame Him.

Then, He uttered this prophecy: **“I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”** His words, no doubt, stunned the disciples. These were outrageous words! Jesus was predicting something very BIG was going to happen in Jerusalem!

A short time later, while sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came privately to Jesus. Jesus’ previous remarks had raised both concern and curiosity within them. **“Tell us,” they said, “when will this [destruction of the temple] happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”**

Jesus’ response to His disciples is recorded by Matthew and Luke. In both gospels one compelling point surfaces: Jesus consistently speaks of *one* return or *one* coming.

He does not allude to a pre-Second Coming rapture.

Notice these seven highlights from Matthew 24 (Italics mine.):

- a. “ . . . he who stands firm *to the end* will be saved.” ( 24:13)
- b. “. . . this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then *the end* will come.” ( 24:14)
- c. “. . . as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be *the coming* of the Son of Man.” ( 24:27)
- d. “At that time *the sign of the Son of Man* will appear in the sky, and all the nations of

the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man *coming on the clouds of the sky*, with power and great glory.” ( 24:30)

e. “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be *at the coming of the Son of Man.*” ( 24:37)

f. “. . . they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be *at the coming of the Son of Man.*” ( 24:39)

g. “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord *will come.*” ( 24:42)

These seven statements along with many others within the context of Matthew 24 and 25 are directed at *one* coming of the Son of Man. To insist that Jesus also talks about a pre-trib rapture in two verses is to frustrate everything else He says in the other 95 verses of these two chapters.

Consider the immediate context of verses 36-43 where the statement is made, “one will be taken, the other left”: **“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.”** ( Matthew 24:36-43)

Three phrases from these verses deserve emphasis:

a. **“No one knows about that day or hour . . . but only the Father.”**

b. **“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.”**

c. **“. . . and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field. . . .”**

Matthew 24:36-43 is concerned about the coming of the Son of Man. This point is stated twice. No one but the Father knows the date of Christ’s coming (a singular coming). Jesus says there is a twofold parallel between Noah’s day and His appearing – most people will be surprised and many will be lost because of willful ignorance.

I believe most Christians will agree that two people can work side-by-side every day and yet, one will be saved and the other will be lost.

This is the meaning and emphasis of the two verses in question. In other words, salvation boils down to *personal* preparation. We cannot depend on our friends, church membership or the charismatic oratory of a pastor for salvation.

Salvation is a personal matter. When end time events unfold, the faithful will be saved and the others will be lost. This point is underscored in the parable of the ten virgins – which is part of this discussion. No doubt, the wise and foolish virgins were close friends.

The difference between the wise and the foolish was preparation.

When the foolish saw that they were without oil, they went to search for it. Meanwhile, the bridegroom arrived and the wise virgins followed Him through the door and into the banquet. Later, the foolish virgins showed up, but were rejected. (See Matthew 25:1-13.)

The key thought in the parable of the ten virgins is daily preparedness.

Jesus said, **“So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”** ( Matthew 24:44) **“The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of.”** ( Matthew 24:30) **“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”** ( Matthew 25:13)

The issue of readiness found in these verses is beyond controversy.

The initial events leading up to the appearing of the Son of Man will come as a surprise to nominal Christians! Notice this verse: **“But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.”** ( 1 Thessalonians 5:4-6)

These verses reveal that there is no need to be surprised about the fulfillment of prophetic events if we are awake, alert and prepared.

Centuries ago the prophet Amos wrote, **“Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.”** ( Amos 3:7)

It seems clear that if we correctly understand the apocalyptic prophecies contained in Daniel and Revelation, there is no need to be surprised. Although we do not know the day or hour of Christ’s return, we can know the timing of events in relation to God’s prophetic clock.

We should always be living as if God’s Word is about to be fulfilled!

## **An Overwhelming Surprise**

The overwhelming surprise that Jesus continues to warn us about is not the Second Coming, but the initiation of the sequence of events leading up to His physical appearing.

How does the surprise occur? Jesus offers this parallel: **“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left . . . .”** ( Matthew 24:37-39)

In other words, before the flood, life went on as usual. People were not fasting or praying for understanding. Instead, they were eating and drinking, planning weddings, and living as if the end of the world was only a figment of someone’s imagination. (See 2 Peter 3:5-7.)

The antediluvians were warned of impending disaster. For 120 years the work and message of faithful Noah irritated the antediluvians. ( Genesis 6:3; Hebrews 11:7; 2 Peter 2:5)

However, they were busy with life’s activities; going about their daily routines with little concern. The antediluvians were warned that the end was coming, but none believed.

So, what did Jesus mean when He said: **“. . . and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.”** In their wildest imagination, the antediluvians did not conceive the enormity or the process of what lay ahead.

In the busy and active lifestyles that existed before the flood, the antediluvians did not intimately concern themselves with Noah’s message or his “crazy” activities.

I am sure Noah’s peers considered him a “kook.” Then one day, without further notice or announcement, Noah and his family went inside the ark. When the animals came in an orderly fashion to enter the ark, few, if any, spectators were present.

Noah’s folly had been there for more than a hundred years – it was “a common sight.” The Lord Himself closed the great door while the rest of the world was totally *unaware* of the significance of what had just happened. ( Genesis 7:16)

Everyone outside the ark was doomed and they did not know it! Everyone inside the ark was “sealed” in and they knew it. The townsfolk did not notice that the work *outside* the great boat had stopped. The noisy hillside had become quiet. Excess building materials and other construction items were laying around the perimeter of the big boat, just as they had been for years.

Things looked pretty much the same. No doubt, intoxicated revelers went out to jeer or mock Noah at times, but no one was disturbed or worried that last night on Earth. Jesus said, “They were eating and drinking” and planning for another day.

What they did not know was that there were no more tomorrows.

Suddenly, a streak of light streamed down from the sky followed by calamitous heaves in the Earth and ocean. These were followed in quick succession by sonic booms and catastrophic

crashes. The grumble of a great earthquake could be heard from deep within the Earth.

The ground began to rise in places, buildings began to fall and the air was suddenly filled with hot moist vapor.

I believe the sky was literally falling! A steady sequence of horrific explosions was heard as fiery meteors and asteroids impacted planet Earth and the fountains of the deep were broken apart.

Although the impacts were some distance away from Noah, the sounds of doom were everywhere. Every eye was wide open.

Every pulse was racing. Suddenly, as if on cue, everyone remembered Noah! "*So this is how it happens,*" they thought as they grabbed as many precious items as they could carry and fled their shaking houses.

The ark, undisturbed and motionless, was illumined by sheets of lightning. The boat stood as a monument for truth. The tall, smooth sides of the ark prevented anyone from climbing aboard. The size and weight of the ark's only door was more than men could move.

I can imagine the sound of frantic pleading – "Noah! Noah! Noah!!! Let us in! Please, let us in. Please!!!"

Within minutes of the meteoric impacts, torrents of water converged on the hillside where a crowd had gathered. I surmise that a great tsunami came rushing in from the ocean and pushed inland, followed by rivers of water pouring from the sky.

The foolish antediluvians were swept to their deaths within minutes. They knew nothing about the course of events because they had refused to listen.

Jesus makes it quite clear: "**As it was in the days before the flood, so shall it also be at the coming of the Son of Man.**"

Noah and his family did not escape the flood, but they did escape destruction because of their faith. ( Hebrews 11:7) Likewise, the saints will not escape the Tribulation, but they do have the assurance of salvation.

They know that Jesus has promised to be with them until the very end. After comparing Noah's day with His Second Coming, Jesus brings His remarks into sharp focus. Two people will be working side by side; one will be saved; the other left behind. Jesus was not alluding to a pre-trib rapture.

He was speaking about the qualifying experience of faith. Faith in God is not something that can be developed within 30 minutes of terror. Faith in God is something that develops through testing and trials.

As Jesus reflected about the time of His return, He saw many parallels between Noah's day

and ours. The Great Tribulation will strike the world with a violence unseen since the days of Noah.

Again, there will be powerful earthquakes, meteoric showers of burning hail and two asteroid impacts. (The first four trumpets consist of great physical harm to this planet.) And yes, there will be enormous terror and death.

Of course, the destruction caused by the seven trumpet events will not be total, as in Noah's day, or no one could live.

Although 50% of the Earth's population will survive these horrific manifestations of God's wrath, the time period of the seven trumpets will be filled with gloom, darkness and despair.

## Little Has Changed

Little has changed. As in Noah's day, most of the world still refuses to listen. Even devout, religious people refuse to hear. They have created sweet prophetic concepts, counting themselves worthy of escaping the Great Tribulation that will soon occur. Many good people are deceived and an overwhelming disappointment is approaching.

Who is to blame for all this misinformation? Everyone – everyone who owns a Bible. God has mercifully put a translation of His Word in almost every language of the world, making sure that everyone who wants to know the truth may have the opportunity.

If people were sincerely searching for truth, having open discussions and studies about the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, Christians would be much better prepared for what is coming.

## Like a Thief

The Apostle Peter sums up the approaching Tribulation saying, **“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare . . . That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.”** ( 1 Peter 3:9-12)

For most of Earth's inhabitants, the Great Tribulation will begin without knowledge or warning – just like a thief!

The Great Tribulation will be 1,335 days in length. ( Daniel 12:11,12) Even if the entire human race were told, few would believe. How sad! **“But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who**

**are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.”** ( 1 Thessalonians 5:4-6)

This you can count on! When the seven trumpets begin, people who have made a habit of studying God's Word and daily listening to His Spirit, will be ready.

People who “played church” *will be left* . . . left wondering what went wrong.

## **Summary**

If we harmonize all that the Bible has to say about the Second Coming, a comprehensive picture begins to form. It will be a most awe-filled day. John wrote, “**Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.**” ( Revelation 1:7)

The prophet Joel saw the great day of the Lord, “**Before them [the warriors of the Lord] the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The Lord thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?**” ( Joel 2:10,11, insertion mine.)

Given the preponderance of evidence throughout Scripture, we have to conclude there is one gathering of the saints – at the Second Coming.