

PROPHETIC STUDY SERIES



IS THE RAPTURE A HOAX?

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On occasion, I have inserted italics and brackets in Scripture quotations to enhance understanding, not to change the meaning.

There are seven questions in this booklet which I hope you will answer. The author's answers are listed at the end. May God bless you as you study this fascinating topic!

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Is the Rapture a Hoax?

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 because gerrymandering has been an ongoing recreation for politicians since nations came into existence. Instead, I am describing the destruction of earthly nations and the creation of a new world whose order God Himself will establish.

The Bible is the only source of truth on this subject, the only book that contains a comprehensive map of soon coming events, and the only authority that speaks for God on this matter. For these reasons, people should carefully consider the seventeen 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 a momentous event is about to occur and, indeed, something very dramatic is about to happen. Jesus is going to awaken billions of people with an enormous demonstration of divine authority. Confusion, mayhem, and extreme suffering will be everywhere, and a trustworthy roadmap explaining Jesus' forthcoming actions will be indispensable.

Although Bible prophecy does not reveal a hopeful 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 Daniel and Revelation is of utmost importance.

After investigating Bible prophecy for many years, I am convinced that whether we agree or disagree with the events described, man's opinions do not affect God or His actions. God will do what He has said He will do. What we may believe about God has nothing to do with His behavior. All that He has predicted will come to pass. Therefore, it is imperative we approach Bible prophecy from an honest perspective to understand God's ways. The Father has placed Jesus in control of closing events.

 Question #1: Jesus is about to awaken people with an enormous demonstration of
 _____.

Apocalyptic Prophecies

Five apocalyptic prophecies are found in the book of Daniel and twelve in Revelation; each prophecy "stacks" on the next like layers of a cake. Each prophecy has a beginning and ending point in time, and each contains an orderly sequence of events. For example, Daniel 2 is the bottom layer or "foundation" prophecy and its timespan 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 timespan as Daniel 2. The

third prophecy (layer) starts about 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 one another, God revealed significant information which would otherwise be unknown.

By linking the five layers together with prophetic events, God says so much with the fewest possible words. This is an important consideration because books in the Old Testament were duplicated by hand. Second, by layering the prophecies, God implemented a process which scholars call repetition and enlargement. It allows us 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.¹

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 with just a few hours of study.

Since people have discovered the layering of the prophecies, they can determine which elements of apocalyptic prophecy are in the past and which are forthcoming!

¹ Daniel 12:4, 9

A brief discussion about the five layers in Daniel has been presented because the five 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 five layers do in the book of Daniel. Even more, the twelve layers of Revelation harmoniously align with the five apocalyptic prophecies in Daniel. When all seventeen prophecies are viewed together, one marvelous prophetic story unfolds in chronological order. All seventeen 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 conforms 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 the chronological layers Revelation adds to Daniel also do not support a pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation rapture.

When the seventeen 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 “timeline” showing past, present, and future events. A

knowledge of this timeline prevents a misapplication of end time statements that occur throughout the Bible. For example, the opening verse of Matthew 24:40-42 is often used by proponents of the pre-tribulation rapture to justify a sudden snatching of people away 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, the verses can be presented in a way that makes it appear to support a pre-tribulation rapture. Before an accurate conclusion can be drawn, 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. With this thought in mind, consider what the Bible has to say about the Second Coming and the concept of a pre-tribulation rapture.

Question #2: Daniel has _____ apocalyptic prophecies and Revelation has _____ apocalyptic prophecies.

Views on the Rapture

Protestants basically support one of four views about the gathering of the saints: a pre-tribulation rapture, a mid-tribulation rapture, a pre-wrath rapture, or a post-tribulation rapture. The concept of a rapture (regardless of timing) is a complicated study because so many ideas are involved. Because most Christians believe in a pre-tribulation scenario, I want to address this schema.

This widely popular belief in a pre-tribulation rapture hinges on four basic doctrines:

1. Even though Jews reject Jesus as the Messiah, they are still God's chosen people. Therefore, God has to fulfill all of the promises that He made to ancient Israel because God always keeps His promises.
2. Salvation has occurred in different ways at different times (dispensations). Therefore, Christians are saved today in a different way than Jews and others before the cross.
3. The seventieth week of Daniel 9 points forward to a period of seven years during which the Great Tribulation will occur, and

4. God will not allow the church to suffer His wrath during the Great Tribulation. Instead, He will take the church to Heaven.

Advocates of this theory weave these four concepts into a divine conflict which God is expected to resolve with a pre-tribulation rapture. Basically, the scenario is this: Israel's persistent rejection of Jesus Christ as Messiah prevents God from fulfilling His promises to them. Therefore, when the time allotted to the Gentiles ends, God will suddenly remove the church from Earth. When the Jews discover that hundreds of millions of Christians are missing from Earth, 144,000 Jews will convert to Christianity and will go throughout the world proclaiming the gospel of Jesus during the Great Tribulation.

Thus, many unbelievers will receive salvation through the Jews and be saved at the Second Coming. To many people, this scenario makes perfect sense. Everything works out so completely: The church will not participate in the Great Tribulation, Israel will convert to Christianity after the church is raptured, and God will be able to fulfill all of the glorious promises that He originally made to the nation of Israel.

I am elaborating on these four matters because I believe the four underlying doctrines supporting the rapture theory are flawed and incomplete doctrines. There are passages of Scripture that stand in opposition to the

fundamentals on which these four doctrines are built. I am convinced the rapture doctrine, as wonderful as it sounds, is a “fragile house of cards” simply because it is not harmonious with the sum of all the Bible has to say about these matters.

 Question #3: The most prevalent rapture doctrine is the _____-tribulation rapture.

World Events

Placing theology aside, many Christians have begun to question whether there will be a pre-tribulation rapture. They are wondering if a pre-tribulation rapture is too good to be true. Why should the final generation escape the Great Tribulation when all other generations of Christians have suffered in the extreme for their faith? History says that nine of the twelve disciples became martyrs, Romans slaughtered tens of thousands of early Christians, and millions of Protestants suffered persecution and death during the Dark Ages.

Even more compelling is that today, tribulation is escalating in the world around us. The intensity and frequency of natural disasters are making some pre-tribulation believers nervous because growing numbers of people are suffering hardship and tribulation now. Many rapture-believing preachers say recent hurricanes, tsunamis, and earthquakes are judgments from God. However, the problem with these horrible events

is the victims are Christians and non-Christians alike. This is unsettling.

If Christians are supposed to escape God's wrath with a pre-tribulation rapture, the question has to be asked, "Why aren't Christians escaping God's wrath now?" If we are honest, we must admit that Christians have been persecuted for nearly 2,000 years. Unfortunately, there will not be a pre-tribulation rapture for the last generation of saints. The Bible repeatedly indicates there will be one gathering of the saints which occurs at the Second Coming. Notice Paul's words:

"According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we [the believers] who are still alive, who are left [on Earth] until the [second] coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those [we will not go to Heaven before those] who have fallen asleep [temporarily died]. 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 [on Earth] will be caught up together with them [that is, the living will join the righteous who were resurrected from their graves] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we [the dead in Christ and the believers who were living on Earth at the time of the Second Coming] will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one other with these words."¹

1 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, insertions mine

Points to Ponder

I cannot begin to address the flaws with the four doctrines upon which a pre-tribulation rapture is based in this short booklet. However, I can make a few comments about the errors on each of the four doctrines.

Doctrine #1:

Even though Jews reject Jesus as the Messiah, they are still God's chosen people. Therefore, God has to fulfill all of the promises that He made to ancient Israel because God always keeps His promises.

Error:

The Bible teaches God changed the definition of Israel by creating a new covenant. Galatians 3:29: **“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed [sperm], and heirs according to the promise.”**¹ **“Consequently, you [Gentiles] are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of His household.”**² Despite what current pre-tribulation rapture adherents believe, these two verses indicate “Jews” are still God’s chosen people, but they are no longer a race of people. Instead, they are a group of people who have accepted Christ! God will give

1 Galatians 3:29, insertion mine

2 Ephesians 2:19, insertion mine

everything He promised to Abraham to those who accept Jesus as their savior.

Doctrine #2:

Salvation has occurred in different ways at different times (the doctrine of dispensationalism). Therefore, Christians are saved today in a different way than Jews and others before the cross.

Error:

The Bible teaches that salvation has always come through faith. There are no dispensations with respect to salvation. According to Hebrews 11, the first man to die (Abel) was saved by faith! Paul clearly says that salvation did not come to the Jews through the slaughter of animals, **“It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”**¹

Doctrine #3:

The seventieth week of Daniel 9 points forward to a period of seven years during which the Great Tribulation will occur.

Error:

The Bible teaches that the seventieth week immediately followed the sixty-ninth week. The seventieth week began in A.D. 27 and ended in A.D. 33. As predicted, Jesus

¹ Hebrews 10:4

died on time, in the middle of the seventieth week (A.D. 30). Furthermore, the Bible teaches the Great Tribulation will last 1,335 days (3 ½ years, not 7 years).¹

Doctrine #4:

God will not allow the church to suffer His wrath during the Great Tribulation. Instead, He will take the church to Heaven.

Error:

The Bible teaches that believers in Jesus will not suffer the penalty for sin (the wrath of the law) which is eternal death. The Bible also teaches that the disciples of Jesus will be persecuted and many will be martyrs. Jesus said, **“They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God.”**² Throughout history, millions have died for Jesus and millions more Christians will soon die for Him! **“When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.”**³

When these issues are harmoniously synthesized, there is only one conclusion possible for me. I am convinced

1 Daniel 12:12

2 John 16:2

3 Revelation 6:9

the doctrine of a pre-tribulation rapture is fiction. Of course, time will tell. Even when I put the chronological order of Daniel and Revelation aside, there are still more 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?

Jesus made this point about when the righteous dead will be resurrected, **“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those 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 them up at the last day.”**¹

The “last day” does not occur at the beginning of the 70th week! Paul wrote, **“According to the Lord’s word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until 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**

¹ John 6:39-40

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

These verses contain several important points:

The living do not precede the dead to Heaven. Jesus Himself will come down from Heaven. He will call the righteous dead to life with a loud command. As the dead ascend, the living will join with them to meet Jesus 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).” However, this is not the meaning of Paul’s remarks.

In verse 15, Paul leads us to two conclusions:

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 used the inclusive pronoun “we” in these texts because he thought he and other living believers (“we”) would live to see Christ

1 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

appear in the clouds and the dead raised from their graves without experiencing death themselves.¹

Paul did not believe in or teach a pre-Second Coming rapture. 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.*”**²

Notice, the Apostle Paul used 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. His idea is quite different from being “left behind after a rapture.” Of course, Paul had no idea time would last 2,000 more years.

When Does the Judgment Occur?

A pre-tribulation rapture mandates a pre-tribulation judgment before the rapture can occur because Jesus has to decide who can be raptured and who cannot. Scripture supports the fact Jesus judges the people of Earth before the Second Coming, but no scriptural support exists for a judgment of the living before the Great Tribulation begins. In fact, the opposite is true. One of the primary

¹ 1 Corinthians 7:29-30

² 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, italics mine

purposes of the Great Tribulation is to judge the living.¹ 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 glorious throne. 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, ‘Truly I tell you, 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.”**²

¹ Revelation 3:10

² 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.”**¹

In this text, Jesus described the scene that will occur on the last day, the day when the eternal reward is given. Jesus said nothing about gathering up His sheep before the Second Coming. He did not say anything 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 people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people 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 blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing**

¹ Matthew 25:31, 32, 46, insertion mine

of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.’ ”¹

These verses conflict with the notion of a pre-tribulation 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.

Jesus said nothing about sparing the weeds for seven more years after the good seed is taken up to Heaven. He said, **“If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come [this time] to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day.”²**

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

1 Matthew 13:37-43, insertion mine

2 John 12:47-48, insertion mine

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 about knowing, not 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 sin¹ and Adam and Eve knew sin could occur, but they did not know what sin was. However, once they had experienced sin, 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 yet been condemned to death! According to Jesus' words in John 12:47-48, everyone left behind after a rapture would be condemned to eternal death. Notice what Jesus said about His appearing: **“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. . . . Blessed are**

1 Genesis 2:17

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.”¹

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 The righteous dead will come to life and rise from the Earth upon command,³ and the righteous living will join the resurrected saints and “fly away” to meet the Lord in the air “at the last day.”⁴

The Bible teaches Jesus will judge man 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 duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed**

1 Revelation 22:12-15

2 2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 19:21

3 Revelation 1:18

4 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”¹ This verse confirms that God will “pass over” or judge each person that lives on Earth. He will review each deed during the judgment process and make a determination regarding each person, whether for salvation or condemnation.

If a people live by faith, then their deeds or works will confirm their faith.² 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 of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”³**

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-tribulation 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!⁴ 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.

1 Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

2 James 2:17

3 2 Corinthians 5:10

4 Revelation 3:10

Question #4: A primary purpose for the Great Tribulation is to _____ the living.

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 consider 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-tribulation rapture of the entire Christian church is simply not justified when we consider the following issues: the timing of the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of the living, 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 timely and local messages to the seven churches, 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-tribulation rapture a testing doctrine. Some people say if you do not believe in the rapture, you cannot be saved after it happens; that there is no second chance.

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

This is interesting, since this position stands in opposition to the basic premise of the pre-tribulation rapture. Pre-tribulation advocates teach 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. The Bible identifies one unpardonable sin¹ and that sin is not the denial of a pre-tribulation 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. The concept that a person could be lost simply by refusing to believe the doctrine of the rapture has no credibility. On the contrary, we receive the assurance of salvation² when we surrender our life to Jesus Christ as Lord and Master.

He is my Shepherd.³ He guides me into all truth through the ministry of the Holy Spirit!⁴ I do not trust any pastor, priest, or rabbi to tell me what I must believe or

1 Matthew 12:31-32

2 1 John 5:12

3 Psalm 23

4 John 16:13

what I must do in order to be saved. My duty is to listen to the Holy Spirit.¹ Jesus brings enlightenment and conviction as I study God's Word for myself. I do 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.²

“One Will be Taken and the Other Left”

A favorite text 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 Jesus will appear suddenly and unexpectedly. On the surface, these verses appear to say two people will be working side by side and, poof, one person will be taken and the other left.

Sometimes people who support the pre-tribulation rapture use these verses to make a sharp distinction between a sudden “thief in the night” kind of gathering

¹ John 3:8

² John 14:21-24; Philippians 2:12-13

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 conclusion is only possible if their context is totally ignored. So, let us take a close look at these comments.

The setting for Matthew 24 begins as Jesus is leaving the temple. His disciples caught up with Him and they drew His attention to the magnificent buildings of 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 respect and cooperation from the Jews. The Jews believed 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 at the gleaming walls of the edifice, a deep sadness overcame Him.

Then, He uttered this prophecy: **“Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”**¹ His words, no doubt, stunned the disciples. These were outrageous words! Jesus was predicting something very tumultuous was going to hap-

¹ Matthew 24:2

pen 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?’ ”**¹

Jesus' response to His disciples is recorded by Matthew and Luke.² In both gospels, one compelling point surfaces: Jesus consistently speaks of one return or one coming. He is not alluding to a pre-Second Coming rapture. To insist that Jesus talks about a pre-tribulation rapture frustrates everything else He says in many other verses of these two chapters. Consider the immediate context of Matthew 24:36-44 where the statement is made, “one will be taken, the other left”. Three phrases from these verses deserve emphasis:

1. **“But about that day or hour no one knows, . . . but only the Father.”**
2. **“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.”**
3. **“And they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them**

1 Matthew 24:3, insertion mine

2 Luke 21:5-36

all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field.”

These verses concern 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 two people can work side by side each day and, yet, one may be saved and the other lost. Salvation boils down to personal preparation. We cannot depend on our friends, church membership, or the charismatic oratory of a pastor for salvation. When end time events unfold, the faithful will be saved and 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 virgins was preparation. The key thought in the parable of the ten virgins is daily preparedness.

The initial events leading to the appearing of the Son of Man will come as a surprise to nominal Christians! Notice this verse: **“But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should sur-**

prise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children 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 awake and sober.”¹

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.”²** 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!

 Question #5: The difference between the wise and foolish is _____.

An Overwhelming Surprise

The overwhelming surprise Jesus continues to warn us about is not the Second Coming, but the initiation

¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:4-6

² Amos 3:7

of the sequence of events leading up to His physical appearing. Jesus offers this parallel from the days of Noah to describe how the surprise occurs: **“And they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.”**¹ In their wildest imagination, the antediluvians did not conceive the enormity or the process of what lie 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 over one 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.²

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 the work outside the great boat had stopped. The noisy hillside had become quiet. Excess building materials and other construction items were lying around the perimeter of the big boat, just as they had been for years.

1 Matthew 24:39

2 Genesis 7:16

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, **“People were eating and drinking”** and planning for another day. What they did not know was that there were no more tomorrows. Suddenly, a steady sequence of horrific explosions occurred 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! I can imagine the sound of frantic pleading. “Noah! Noah!! Let us in! Please, let us in. Please!!!” Within minutes, the foolish antediluvians were swept to their deaths. 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 of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.”**¹

Noah and his family did not escape the flood, but they did escape destruction because of their faith.² 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

¹ Matthew 24:37

² Hebrews 11:7

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-tribulation rapture. He was speaking about the qualifying experience of faith. Faith in God is not produced when convenient. Instead, faith in God develops through testing and trial.

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

Little Has Changed

As in Noah's day, most of the world still refuses to listen. Even devoutly 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. God has mercifully provided 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 Christians were sincerely searching for truth and discussing the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, they would be much better prepared for what is coming.

Like a Thief

The Apostle Peter summarizes the approaching Tribulation saying, **“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead 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.”**¹ 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.² Unfortunately, even if the entire human race were told, few would believe. How sad! However, you can count on the fact that 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.

 Question #6: 2 Peter 3 is referring to the initiation of the _____, not the _____.

Left Behind

In a previous section, I made reference to being “left behind after a rapture” and I need to address this well-

¹ 2 Peter 3:9-10

² Daniel 12:11-12

known doctrine. In fact, several people have asked me to comment on the movie, *Left Behind*; but before I present my thoughts on the doctrine and this movie series, I need to make four statements.

First, even though the story line in this movie is a work of fiction, it should not be regarded as just another movie. This movie belongs in a special category because the story line represents the biblical beliefs of many evangelical Christians.

Second, this movie was produced by evangelicals to make a religious statement to both Christians and non-Christians. Unlike entertainment movies, the mission of the sponsors and producers of *Left Behind* is to inform as many people as possible about their particular view of Bible prophecy.

Third, this movie is based on a pre-tribulation prophetic schematic. The term “pre-tribulation” is used because this view predicts that all born-again Christians will be taken to Heaven prior to the commencement of the Great Tribulation in an event called the “rapture.”

My fourth statement is the most serious. All claims, including my own, about future fulfillment of prophecy are a matter of faith, not fact. These claims are not a matter of fact because it is impossible to prove the accuracy of a prediction that has not occurred.

For example, no one can prove there will be a Second Coming. Jesus said He will return, but a promise is not evidentiary fact. People may put their faith in the promises of Jesus, but faith is not fact.¹ Faith and fact are mutually exclusive. When something has become a known fact, there is no need for faith. Therefore, all prophetic schematics concerning the future are ultimately statements of faith, not fact.

The truthfulness found in these four statements level the playing field as far as humanities' grasp of God's future plans. It is important to remember that all end time schematics are based on faith, and do not have an equal chance of being accurate. When it comes to the accuracy of prophetic schematics, popularity and scholarly endorsement mean nothing. Noah's "flood schematic" had less than a dozen believers after a century of preaching!

So, the prophetic schematic which will be proven to be true in the end is the one that accurately explains the intended meaning of God's Word. I believe it is possible to test a prophetic schematic to see if it is true or false before predicted events occur and this is done by using valid rules of interpretation. The key to accurately understanding apocalyptic prophecy is based on understanding and administering rules of interpretation that

¹ John 14:1-3; Hebrews 11:1-6

dictate the meaning of prophecy. We know a set of rules are valid if they align past fulfillment of prophecy with recorded history.

This process helps us to anticipate future events because they harmonize with events that have already been fulfilled. God is consistent and there is a beautiful harmony that is revealed from the sum of its parts. If a person uses valid keys of interpretation appropriately, that person can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, discover the intended meaning of apocalyptic prophecy. Valid rules of interpretation do not favor one particular denominational view. Valid rules are self-evident within the Bible itself.

Question #7: Apocalyptic prophecy may be understood just as it reads when valid _____
_____ are used.

The Movie

The movie, *Left Behind*, was based on a series of best-selling books written by Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye. I found the movie to be entertaining and enlightening for two reasons. First, this “true-to-life” drama illustrates several prophetic concepts pre-tribulation evangelicals believe. It was interesting to see pre-tribulation views portrayed in “real-life” situations. Second, some evan-

gelicals have used this movie as an “entering wedge” to convey their concepts of God and the necessity for salvation to a secular audience. The basic message of this movie is “Get right with God now – or be left behind.”

I do not think we can expect this movie to measure up to Hollywood’s hits. The special effects are not as convincing as multimillion dollar movies. But these deficiencies did not hurt the core message of the movie. A secular viewer with no previous understanding of the pre-tribulation schematic may not understand how certain details connect in the story and will probably forget most of the details within a few days. The one element the viewer may not forget, however, is the emotional response of being “left behind.”

On the other hand, I believe the movie has had a lasting impact on individuals who sincerely believe in the pre-tribulation schematic.

Pre-Tribulation Schematic

Considering some readers may not be acquainted with the pre-tribulation framework, here is a brief overview.

In the near future, Arab enemies will try to destroy Israel and the Jews (God’s chosen people), but God will miraculously protect Israel. On or about the time of this attack, without warning or notice, God will snatch up

all born-again Christians from Earth and the wicked will be “left behind.” This event is called the rapture and it marks the beginning of a seven-year period called “The Great Tribulation.”

After the rapture, it is believed that a series of judgments from God will occur on Earth. Much destruction and human turmoil will follow. The rapture of millions of Christians will be seen as a powerful fulfillment of prophecy. Upon witnessing this event, it is believed that 144,000 Jews will convert to Christianity. They will begin to evangelize the world like the apostle Paul, preaching the gospel of Christ.

At this time, many people will give their hearts to the Lord for two reasons: First, the sudden disappearance of millions of people will confirm the pre-tribulation version of the gospel. Second, the Great Tribulation will impose so much suffering on all nations that people will repent of their disbelief to avoid eternal destruction.

While the Jews are heralding the gospel throughout the Earth, a man from Europe will come to the attention of Earth’s inhabitants. This man gains influence and control over the world through the United Nations. Soon, it becomes evident that this man is the dreaded Antichrist. Some pre-tribulation believers think the Antichrist is presently living in obscurity in Europe and will quickly

rise to fame and popularity on or about the time of the rapture. At first, he will appear to be very effective in his pursuit to restore peace among the nations of Earth. It is believed that He will gain control over the nations of Europe, but as circumstances change, his masquerade is removed about midway through the Great Tribulation, revealing his true identity as the evil Antichrist.

Continuing in the pre-tribulation view, the Antichrist will declare himself to be God and establish himself in God's temple. Pre-tribulation adherents believe the term "God's temple" refers to the soon-to-be-rebuilt Jewish temple and they believe the Antichrist will eventually rule the world through a one-world religion from the rebuilt temple. When the midway point of the Great Tribulation is reached, the Antichrist will show his evil side and force everyone to worship him.

The inhabitants of Earth will be forced to receive his mark or suffer the consequence of death. At the end of the seven years, Jesus will appear in clouds of glory with all of the raptured Christians accompanying Him. They will be met by a great multitude of believers on Earth. Jesus will establish His kingdom here on Earth and the converted Jews will serve as priests over all the Earth. The devil will be put in prison for 1,000 years so he cannot tempt the nations.

Pre-tribulation proponents believe there will be 1,000 years of peace and righteousness. At the end of 1,000 years, the wicked will be destroyed and eternity will begin.

Commentary

I personally do not believe the pre-tribulation view is a valid schematic, because I have found many flaws in its presentation. Ironically, the movie and the bestselling books upon which the movie is based may contribute to the undoing of the pre-tribulation schematic if end time events do not unfold as the movie predicts. Such is the double-edged sword of interpreting prophecy.

If a widely accepted view eventually proves to be false, where do believers turn when their doctrines fail? Many prophetic schematics have gained notoriety only to be abandoned when the passage of time proved them wrong. A good example of how this process works is the story of Baptist evangelist, William Miller. He preached that the Second Coming would occur in 1844. When it did not happen, the Millerite movement collapsed and vanished in one day!

The Theological Problems

Left Behind is a story depicting the end time scenario as understood by certain evangelicals. Does the Bible confirm this view of end time events? The answer depends

on whom you ask. Do not misunderstand. The creators of this movie have every right to present their views before the world. They did a good job of staying within the boundaries of the pre-tribulation schematic.

I am not quibbling about the contents of the movie or the freedom people have to present their religious views to the world. I say, “More power to them!” However, I do challenge the biblical basis for the movie that I find to be inherently wrong. For example, in the movie, the viewer is informed that those “left behind” have a chance to repent of their sins and become believers in Christ. This implies that if you miss the rapture, there is another chance to be saved. I believe the doctrine of a second chance as presented in the movie to be non-Scriptural.

Consider the problem: A pre-tribulation rapture mandates an eternal judgment of every living person on Earth prior to the rapture. This judgment would be necessary to determine who will be raptured and who will be left behind. This pre-rapture judgment is not described in the Bible. Although the apostle Paul and others describe a time that we will stand before the judgment bar of Christ to receive our reward,¹ Paul writes nothing about being judged twice. If a person is sentenced to eternal death before the rapture, how can he be sentenced to eternal life later on?

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:10

Further, why should people living at the time of the alleged rapture be given a second chance to be saved when previous generations were not given this reprieve? Think of the billions of people who have died since Abel – none of them got a second chance.

Converted to What?

The essential premise of the pre-tribulation schematic is that millions of people will convert to Christianity because the rapture proves the superiority of Christianity over every false religion of the world. By taking born-again Christians to Heaven first, the world suddenly awakes to the realization that God favors Christians and disfavors the rest of humanity!

Pre-tribulation proponents believe there will be a wholesale conversion of 144,000 Jews to Christ after the rapture. These converted Jews will then carry the gospel of Jesus throughout the world during the seven years, expecting many converts as a result.

It is highly unlikely the rapture of millions of Christians will convert 144,000 Jews. In fact, if there were a sudden worldwide rapture of millions of born-again Christians, the Jews, Arabs, Moslems, and Hindus might all say “good riddance.” While “Get right or get left!” may work as a soundbite, it is not judicially fair for people to

be forced to accept Jesus out of fear. Heaven is no fire escape from hell.

Fear is a powerful motivation, but a decision made under duress or torture is neither valid nor long-lasting. Wouldn't it be much better for people to grasp the gift of salvation through the atoning death of Jesus and let His love draw us to Him? Love should be the motive for marriage and love should be the motive for becoming a follower of Jesus. True love prompts us to confess our sins and ask forgiveness. Foxhole conversions do occur, but few remain committed Christians for a lifetime.

The Antichrist

The purpose and role of Antichrist as depicted in the movie, in my estimation, limit his role in end time events. The coming Antichrist is not a mere man, but Lucifer, the devil, garbed in the flesh of man. The Antichrist will attempt to mimic Jesus' return, by appearing in clouds of glory and attended by millions of angels. Masquerading as God for a period of time, he will deceive the world into thinking he is Almighty God. The pre-tribulation conclusions about the coming Antichrist are grossly understated.

Who is Israel?

Surprisingly, the movie does not present issues concerning Jews who are core issues to the pre-tribulation

schematic. Much of this schema is based on the idea of dispensationalism which claims that God treats Jews differently than Christians. A quick read of Romans, Ephesians, and Galatians defeats this notion. The pre-tribulation rapture is based on the idea that God needs to remove all born-again Christians from Earth so He can finish His original plans with a converted Israel.

The underlying problem is who constitutes Israel? As far as God is concerned, Israel is made up of people who put their faith in Christ, as did Abraham.¹ This single point is a disruptor to this whole paradigm. In summary, I believe the movie is worth seeing. It is more than entertainment. It is edutainment. If the movie encourages you to get out your Bible and find some answers, the time spent viewing the movie could prove to be a great investment.

Temple Rebuilt

Not long ago, I turned on the television and instead of viewing my regular news channel, the television had reset to a different channel because the electricity had gone off. Imagine my surprise when I saw an evangelist speaking instead of the news. I thought I would watch the program for a few minutes to see why he was so excited. He was enlivened by recent developments in Israel.

¹ Romans 9:5-6; Galatians 3:28-29

From what I gathered, he was overjoyed at the preparations made by a group of Jews who intend to rebuild their temple. Evidently, a number of Jewish “rebuilders” are ready to go to work at a moment’s notice, if and when a political solution or military action makes construction possible.

To demonstrate the passion of the rebuilders, the television evangelist showed a video clip of four men carrying a golden replica of the Ark of the Covenant on their shoulders. He also mentioned that schools have been set up in Israel to train priests for the sacrificial rituals which will be conducted once the temple is rebuilt. He stated Bible prophecy predicts the temple will be rebuilt and he was excited about developments that were quickly moving toward that great day. I know, from watching other Christian broadcasts, he also believes the efforts of the rebuilders in Israel indicate the rapture of the “church” is very near.

The program presented a video clip showing a rabbi standing before a crowd of people making a declaration that went something like this: “We [the Jews] believe in a coming Messiah. If it turns out that the Messiah is Jesus, we will accept Him.” The well-known presenter said he “shivered all over” when he heard these words. Perhaps he shivered because he believes that 144,000 Jews will indeed become believers in Jesus after the

rapture and millions of Jews (and others) will be given a second chance to receive Christ as Messiah and Savior during the Great Tribulation.

The willingness of a Jewish Rabbi to accept Jesus as the Messiah gave him the shivers because he sees a shift in Jewish attitudes and he thinks this is a prophetic fulfillment in the making.

One of the Last Prophetic Signs

For millions of Christians, the rebuilding of the Jewish temple is one of the last prophetic signs that occurs about the time the seventieth week begins. These Christians have a prophetic schematic that makes the nation of Israel central to end time events.

They believe the temple in Jerusalem has to be rebuilt. First, they believe Paul predicted the Antichrist will physically enter the Jewish temple and declare himself to be God. **“He [the Antichrist] will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.”**¹

Second, they also believe Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:15 point to the Antichrist standing in the rebuilt temple: **“So when you see standing in the holy**

¹ 2 Thessalonians 2:4, insertion mine

place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.’¹

The “Rock” of Impasse

The Most Holy Place of Israel’s first temple was built on the same rock where Abraham offered Isaac. God specifically directed King David to this rock. The rock is 39 feet by 56 feet and is the highest point on the temple mount and Solomon built the temple on this location. In 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple and a second temple was built about 515 B.C., but the construction was nothing compared to that of the first temple.

The second temple was “reconstructed” several times and the Romans eventually destroyed it in A.D. 70. Roman soldiers pulled the great stones of the second temple apart to find the gold that melted and ran into the cracks during the great fire which consumed the temple.

For centuries following A.D. 70, the temple mount laid in ruins and Jerusalem was ruled by various Arab caliphs. In A.D. 692, Abd al-Malik completed the construction of the Dome of the Rock. He wanted to reduce the influence and authority of a rival caliph in Mecca.

¹ Matthew 24:15-16

So, Abd al-Malik built a beautiful edifice that would serve as a holy shrine for Moslems, and also serve as a place of prayer for Jews and Christians.

Abd al-Malik made the claim that Mohammed was taken up into the seventh Heaven from this rock one night to meet with Allah. Therefore, the Dome of the Rock became a “holy” shrine for Moslems. They believe when Mohammed returned to Earth, he was anointed to spread the teaching of Islam.

Attempts have been made to prove that the Holy of Holies, the most sacred room in the Jewish temple, was not located where the Dome of the Rock now stands. Archeology aside, placing the Holy of Holies on a mountain prominence that is physically lower than the Dome of the Rock would be the equivalent of putting the God of the Jews in a lower position than the God of the Moslems, and human nature predicts this is not going to happen. Of course, the Jews remain perplexed about rebuilding their temple. If possible, Israel would be willing to pay a very great price to possess the rock.

If we harmonize all 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.”¹

The prophet Joel saw the great day of the Lord, **“Before them [the warriors of the Lord] the earth shakes, the heavens tremble, 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 is the army that obeys his command. The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?”²**

Given the preponderance of evidence throughout Scripture, we have to conclude there is only one gathering of the saints: at the Second Coming. A pre-tribulation rapture is not found in God’s holy Word.

Answers to Questions:

1. divine authority
2. five / twelve
3. pre
4. judge
5. preparation
6. Great Tribulation / Second Coming
7. rules of interpretation

¹ Revelation 1:7

² Joel 2:10-11, insertion mine

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