

THE RAPTURE SEQUENCE

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Introduction.

Many Protestant Evangelicals today believe that Christians of the very end-times will not be subject to the trials of what Jesus labeled The Great Tribulation. They believe that they will be removed from Earth prior to the Great Tribulation, in what is labeled the Rapture. This belief has come to be known as a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.

Such belief on the part of individual Christians promotes a lack of corporate preparation for the Church's duties in the very end-times. Under the belief that there are no hard times coming for the Church, its churches can focus on comfortable Christianity, rather than on preparing for conditions like those in the early Church. This leads to churches that manifest "*...a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof ...*" [2 Tim. 3:5].

This Pre-Trib Rapture doctrine was not held nor taught in any branch of Christianity, prior to 1830. Thus, it a new result and is suspect for that reason, alone. It was formulated by a prophetess in a Catholic sect, proceeding from her private revelation. The doctrine was modified and then promulgated by the leader of the Plymouth Brethren movement. It was then picked up and supported by C.I. Scofield, the publisher of the bible of the same name in 1909, which became popular in Fundamentalist circles. These facts can be found in Pastor Schwertley's recent writings at <http://www.reformedonline.com/view/reformedonline/s36p94.htm>

This doctrine was justified through the discredited interpretational practice of forcing a pre-existing theology upon scripture, rather than taking a theology from scripture. It also required ignoring clear scriptural passages that oppose it. Such a procedural error is common in the formation of cults.

By getting into the Bible, Christians can easily confirm for themselves that the Pre-Trib Rapture belief is scripturally unsound. And, not a lot of reading is required. It takes only a handful of scriptures. What the author shall briefly do here is just give the bare bones of the scriptural facts that should be read.

What Does the Bible Say?

The “*Rapture*” is a common Christian term referring to Jesus’ removal from Earth of Christians still alive in the times of the Great Tribulation. The English word, “*rapture*,” is not actually in the Bible. Jesus’ words are recorded in the Greek New Testament as saying that the event would be a “*gathering up together*,” being the single Greek word, “*episynago*.” That word combines the three separate ideas of leading, up, together [Mat. 24:31].

In Matthew-24, Jesus was responding to questions put privately to Him by His disciples, concerning the completion of the age (*eon*) and Jesus’ “*coming*” (*parousia*) [Mat. 24:3]. Now, this “*parousia*” coming of Jesus is when He appears before God, the Father, with all His saints [1 Ths. 3:13]. This word, *parousia*, has the meaning of “*in the presence of*.” Therefore, it is a result of the Rapture event, at which He sends His angels to pick up His saints [Mat. 24:31]. At the Rapture, Jesus does “... *come in the clouds, with power and great glory*.” That “*coming*” is “*erchomai*,” which is a quite common word, being used some 604 times in the New Testament. As used in [Mat. 24:30], *erchomai* has more of the meaning of *appearing*, as in showing up.

Jesus was very specific about the sequence of events that occur before the Rapture. In Matthew-24, He gave the disciples a quite extensive instruction concerning the sequence. The original question was about when He was coming (*parousia*) back at the end of the age. The disciples were asking “*when*.” Jesus said that the exact calendar day/hour timing of His *parousia* coming was known only to the Father [Mat. 24:36]. However, He gave a lot of information about His *erchomai* coming, for the Rapture. This information was in the form of a sequence of events, by which His followers could identify the general timing of the Rapture. He said that when these events occurred, the Christian could assume that the Rapture event was “*at the doors*” [Mat. 24:33].

Jesus’ Description of the Great Tribulation.

Jesus labeled the conditions at the end of the age as Great Tribulation. The English word, “*tribulation*,” being the Greek “*thlipsis*,” means affliction, pressure, anguish, burden, persecution, and/or trouble. He described it as including church deception, wars, famines, plagues (pandemics), earthquakes, delivery of Christians up to be tortured and killed, and hatred of Christians by many nations, because of the Name of Jesus. As a result of this tribulation, many Christians will then “*stumble*,” betraying and hating one another. Iniquity shall abound and Christian love (*agape*) of many shall grow cold. [Mat. 24:4-14].

Jesus followed this description with an injunction to “*head for the hills*” when Christians see the “*abomination of desolation*” (described by Daniel) standing in the holy place. He identified this as a mystery, requiring understanding. At that time the Tribulation would become greater than ever seen in the world before. He warned not to pay attention to false prophets and false Christs that would attempt to mislead Christianity [Mat. 24:15-26].

The Physically Observable Events, Just Preceding the Rapture.

After His description of the Great Tribulation, Jesus identified a set of physical events occurring just before His *erchomai* coming in the Rapture. These events are

astronomical, and therefore observable by all. They are darkening of the sun and moon [Mat. 24:29]. Peter preached on this subject [Acts 2:20], referencing the prophet, Joel [Joel 2,3].

It was the prophet, John, who added to the description of these astronomical events, when he wrote up the Book of Revelation. John documented seven trumpets, wielded by seven angels, announcing seven judgments of God upon the earth and its peoples. The first four trumpet judgments are astronomical events, of which the fourth is the darkening of sun, moon, and stars (a third of each) [Rev. 9:12]. The Bible says that it is at the seventh (and final) trumpet that the “mystery of God” is completed, in just the way He has previously declared to His servants, the prophets [1 Cor. 15:52].

Jesus said that immediately after the tribulation days, the sun and moon would be darkened [Mat. 24:29]. Therefore, the sun and moon darkening (the fourth Trumpet) occurs at the end of the Great Tribulation. Jesus next said [Mat. 24:30] that then his *erchomai* coming would occur. He then said that He would send the angels with a great sound of a trumpet, to gather His elect (the Rapture) [Mat. 24:31]. But, is this at the fourth trumpet? It is Paul who settles this question and resolves this part of God’s mystery.

Paul was talking to the church at Thessalonica about resurrection. He said that those who remained alive at the *parousia* coming of the Lord should not precede those who had already died in Christ. Jesus should descend at the trumpet, and those who are still alive should be caught up together with the dead in Christ [1 Ths. 4:13-17]. This is the Rapture. Similarly, when talking to the church at Corinth about the same thing, Paul said that at the sound of the trumpet, the dead should be raised and those still alive should be changed (in condition). And, here Paul identifies it as the last (*eschatos*) trumpet [1 Cor. 15:51-52]. In Revelation we see the last trumpet to be the seventh.

Taking Jesus’ and Paul’s verses together shows us several things. First, the seventh trumpet is the one that marks the Rapture. Second, Jesus’ *erchomai* coming (the Rapture) and His *parousia* coming, bringing the saints before God, the Father, occur at essentially the same time, being the seventh trumpet. And, these are after the darkening of sun and moon, which was the fourth trumpet. Therefore the Rapture of the Christians who are still alive occurs after much of the Great Tribulation. And, importantly for the saints of the time, there are earthly observable signs of the approach of the Rapture event. When we see the Fourth Trumpet observables, we will know that the Rapture is near.

Conclusion.

There is no “*easy out*,” as in a “*Pre-Trib Rapture*,” according to the Bible. It only takes reading a handful of scriptures to see this. Christians are well-advised to not take someone else’s teaching on this, but to examine it for themselves. It is not a matter that takes some great theological discourse. There are three key verses that make the point. In order of reading, they are

Three Key Verses to Sequence the Rapture Event.

Scripture	Description
Rev. 8:6-12	“Trumpets” Destruction Prior to Sun, Moon Darkening.
Mat. 24:29-31	Sun, Moon Darkening Prior to Rapture Trumpet.
1 Cor. 15:52	Rapture at Final Trumpet.

There is no easy out for end-times Christians, any more than there was an easy out for first-generation Christians, or for Jesus, himself. That’s why He advised us to pick up our crosses and follow him [Luke 9:23]. The Great Tribulation is the final battle that Jesus wages, prior to His delivering up the kingdom to God, the Father, at the *parousia* coming [1 Cor. 15:24]. Until that event, we all stand in jeopardy, every hour [1 Cor. 15:31].