

Free at Last! The Rapture of the Church
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

By: J. B. Hixson, Ph.D.
www.notbyworks.org

1. The PRESENTATION of the Rapture

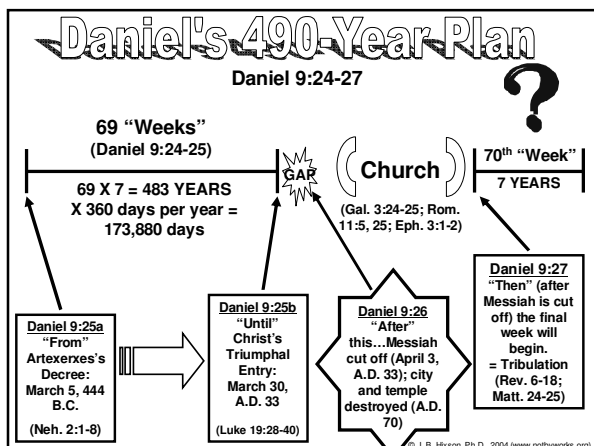
- The *rapture* refers to the sudden catching up of church age believers to meet the Lord in the air when He returns at the close of the present age.
- The rapture, like the church age, is a mystery (1 Cor. 15:51).

1. The PRESENTATION of the Rapture

- The rapture is the next great prophetic event to which the world looks forward.
- It is *imminent*.
- Key rapture passages:
 - 1 Thess. 4:13-18
 - 1 Cor. 15:50-58
 - John 14:1-3
 - 2 Thess. 2:1-10

2. The PURPOSE of the rapture

A. The rapture brings an end to the church age.



Five Purposes of the Church Age

1. To call out a people for His name (Acts 15:14; cf. 11:26)
2. To showcase the exceeding riches of God's grace and mercy (Eph. 2:7; Rom. 11:31)
3. To get Israel's attention (Rom. 11:11)
4. To showcase God's wisdom (Eph. 3:10)
5. To prepare a body that will help rule the Messianic Kingdom (Matt. 19:28; Lk. 19:11-27; 22:28-30; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:4-6)

2. The PURPOSE of the rapture

- A. The rapture brings an end to the church age.
- B. The rapture provides certain blessings for the body of Christ.

Special Blessings for the Church

- Glorified bodies (1 Cor. 15:51; Rom. 8:23-25)
- Meet the Lord (1 Thess. 4:17)
- Reunion with loved ones (1 Thess. 4:17)
- Rewards (Rev. 22:12)
- Marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:6-8)

2. The PURPOSE of the rapture

- A. The rapture brings an end to the church age.
- B. The rapture provides certain blessings for the body of Christ.
- C. The rapture rescues the church from the wrath to come.
 - 1 Thess. 1:10
 - 1 Thess. 5:9
 - Rev. 3:10

3. The PORTRAYAL of the rapture

- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
 - The certainty of the rapture is connected to the historical reality of Jesus' resurrection (v. 14).
 - The Lord will return during the earthly lives of some believers (v. 15).
 - Jesus Himself will descend with a shout, the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God (v. 16).

3. The PORTRAYAL of the rapture

- The bodies of dead believers will be resurrected and glorified (v. 16).
- Living believers will be translated into their glorified bodies in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor. 15:51-52).
- Translated believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (v. 17).
- Our eternity with Christ begins (v. 17)!

A Comparison of the Rapture in John 14 and First Thessalonians 4

John 14:1-3

Trouble (v. 1)
 Believe (v. 1)
 God, me (v. 1)
 Told you (v. 2)
 Come again (v. 3)
 Receive you (v. 3)
 To myself (v. 3)
 Be where I am (v. 3)

1 Thess. 4:13-18

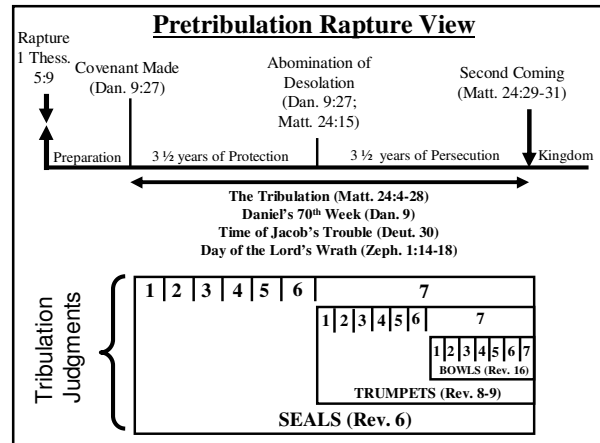
Sorrow (v. 13)
 Believe (v. 14)
 Jesus, God (v. 14)
 Say to you (v. 15)
 Coming of the Lord (v. 15)
 Caught up (v. 17)
 To meet the Lord (v. 17)
 Be with the Lord (v. 17)

Contrasts between the Rapture in First Thessalonians 4 and the Second Coming in Revelation 19	
1 Thess. 4:13-18	Revelation 19:11-21
Christ comes in the air	Christ comes to the earth
Only saved are in view	Saved/unsaved are in view
Dead are raised to life	Living are sent to death
Believers go from earth to heaven	Believers come from heaven to earth

Additional Contrasts between the Rapture and the Second Coming	
Rapture	Second Coming
Is followed immediately by the tribulation	Is followed immediately by the millennium
Is imminent	Is preceded by numerous signs
Is a mystery	Is predicted in the OT
Purpose is to rescue	Purpose is to judge
Is a message of comfort	Is a message of warning and judgment

4. The PLACEMENT of the rapture

Pretribulationism



- ### Five Proofs of Pretribulationism
- The church will be rescued *before* the Day of the Lord's wrath.
 - 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Rev. 3:10
 - The Day of the Lord's wrath encompasses the entire 70th week of Daniel (Zeph. 1:14-18; Hos. 5:10; Ez. 7:19; Luke 21:23).

- ### Day of the Lord's Wrath
- The seal judgments of Revelation 6 comprise the prophetic wrath of God.
 - Rev. 4-5 is a theodicy which demonstrates that the Lamb is worthy and justified to open the seals.
 - Opening the seals = unleashing the wrath of God.
 - For the first four seals the four living creatures are announcing the source of the wrath.

Day of the Lord's Wrath

- Rev. 6:8 quotes Ezekiel 14:21. The Ezekiel context is clearly wrath.
- In Rev. 6:16-17 the people are already hiding from the wrath of God.
- *Thus, the seal judgments = the prophetic wrath of God.*

Day of the Lord's Wrath

- The seal judgments of Revelation 6 begin at the start of the seven-year Tribulation.
 - The first seal is the unveiling of the antichrist. This must occur at the beginning of the Tribulation according to Daniel 9:27.
 - The Olivet Discourse gives a chronological account of the entire 70th week of Daniel (note time words; cf. Matt. 24:15).

Day of the Lord's Wrath

- A comparison of the seals with the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 indicates that the seals take place at the start of the 70th week.

A Comparison of the Olivet Discourse and the Seal Judgments

Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21)	Seal Judgments (Rev. 6)
1. ANTICHRISTS (Matt. 24:4-5, 23-26; Mark 13:6, 21-23; Luke 21:8)	1. Unveiling the Antichrist (Rev. 6:1-2)
2. WAR (Matt. 24:6-7; Mark 13:7-8; Luke 21:9-10)	2. Peace taken from earth (Rev. 6:3-4)
3. FAMINE (Matt. 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11)	3. Famine (Rev. 6:5-6)
4. DEATH (Matt. 24:9, 22, 28; Mark 13:12, 20; Luke 21:16)	4. Death (Rev. 6:7-8)
5. MARTYRDOM (Matt. 24:9-13; Luke 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-19)	5. Cries for revenge of martyrs (Rev. 6:9-11)
6. COSMIC SIGNS (Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:11)	6. Earthquakes and cosmic disturbances (Rev. 6:12-17)

Day of the Lord's Wrath

- Conclusion:
 - Since the seals = the prophetic "Day of the Lord's wrath,"
 - And since the seals begin at the start of the 70th week of Daniel;
 - The "Day of the Lord's wrath" *must begin* at the start of Daniel's 70th week.
 - And since the church is rescued from (kept out of) the Day of the Lord's wrath, the church must be raptured before the tribulation.

Five Proofs of Pretribulationism

1. The church will be rescued *before* the Day of the Lord's wrath.
 - 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Rev. 3:10
2. The nature of the tribulation is totally Jewish.

Jewish Nature of the Tribulation

- “Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7)
- “your people” and “your holy city” (Dan. 9:24)
- 144,000 (Rev. 7)
- Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24-25)
- OT descriptions of this period (e.g. Zech. 12:8-9)

Five Proofs of Pretribulationism

1. The church will be rescued *before* the Day of the Lord’s wrath.
 - 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Rev. 3:10
2. The nature of the tribulation is totally Jewish.
3. The literary structure of the book of Revelation indicates that the church is not present once the seals begin.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION					
Church Age	Rapture	Tribulation - 7 years	Second Coming	Kingdom	
	First Half	Second Half			
Christ Rev. 1	Seals Rev. 6	Trumpets Rev. 8-9	Bowls Rev. 15-16	Millennium Rev. 20	Eternal State Rev. 21-22
Churches Rev. 2-3	144,000 Rev. 7 & 14 <small>Little Book Rev. 10 (at midpoint)</small>		Supplemental Information		
Theodicy Rev. 4-5	Two Witnesses Rev. 11				
		Persecution of Israel Rev. 12			
		Beast & False Prophet Rev. 13			
		Prelude to the Harvest Rev. 14			
		Fall of Babylon & Christ’s Return Rev. 17-19			

© J. B. Hixson, Ph.D. www.notbyworks.org Rev. 5-16-2004

Five Proofs of Pretribulationism

4. The mystery concept of the church makes a pretribulation rapture a necessity.
 - The church is a temporary interruption in God’s program with Israel, which was not brought into existence until after the 69th week of Daniel.
 - Since the church has no place, historically, in the first 69 weeks, it follows that the church has no place in the 70th week.

Five Proofs of Pretribulationism

5. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10 explicitly demands a pretribulation rapture.
 - The issue at hand is: “Are we in the Day of the Lord or not?”
 - Paul assures them that the day of the Lord is not here because the “departure” has not happened and the “man of sin” has not been unveiled (v. 3).

Five Proofs of Pretribulationism

- Furthermore, the “restrainer” must be taken out of the way (v. 7)
- The conclusion is that the departure of the church to meet the Lord in the air (i.e. the rapture) must precede the arrival of the Day of the Lord’s wrath.

A Note about Imminency

- There are several passages that imply the imminent return of the Lord for his bride.
 - 1 Cor. 15:51-52; Phil. 3:20; 4:5; Titus 2:13; James 5:7-9; 1 John 2:28; Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12, 17, 20.
- Notice that this list *does not* include “watchful language” passages (e.g 1 Thess. 5:2) because that terminology is also used to refer to the second coming, which is *not* imminent (eg. Matt. 24:42; Rev. 16:15).

A Note about Imminency

- In other words, an exhortation to “watch” for the Lord’s return is not necessarily an explicit indication of the imminency of the rapture since believers during the tribulation are likewise exhorted to “watch,” and the second coming is obviously not imminent.

A Note about Imminency

- Imminency is not a primary exegetical proof of pretribulationism.
- Rather, imminency is derived from theological conclusions regarding the order of end times events.
- That is, imminency does not prove pretribulationism; pretribulationism demands imminency.

5. The PROVOCATION of the rapture

- A. Do not be troubled. (John 14:1; cf. 2 Thess. 2:2)
- B. Comfort one another. (1 Thess. 4:18)
- C. Do not be concerned with the date of the rapture. (1 Thes. 5:1)
- D. Be steadfast, immovable and abounding in the work of the Lord. (1 Cor. 15:58)

To Whom It May Concern

The believers of this household are looking for the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ. When it occurs, it will suddenly be discovered that thousands of people are missing and this home will be found empty. Then may you realize that the true Christian Church has been taken out of this world, an event of which the Apostle Paul wrote so clearly in 1 Thess. 4:13-18 and 1 Cor. 15:50-58.

It will mean that Christ has called His people, those who are saved by grace through faith in Him to “ever be with the Lord.”

Do not search for us. We will return with Christ after seven years of tribulation (spoken of in Revelation chapters 6-18) when He comes to judge the antichrist and to take the throne of His father, David, as promised Him. In the meantime, do not weep for us. For we are finally home!

Challenge

1. **Remain in close fellowship with Christ so that we are not ashamed when He comes (1 John 2:28).**
2. **Live our lives in such a way that we will be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:9-11; Col. 3:23-24; 2 John 8; Rev. 22:12).**
3. **Redeem the time because there is no guarantee of tomorrow (cf. James 4:14; Eph. 5:15-16).**

Challenge

4. **Anticipate and be comforted by the prospect of being reunited with believers who have died (1 Thess. 4:13-18).**
5. **Allow the prospect of the rapture to give you hope during difficult times (Col. 1:27; Titus 2:13).**