

When Will the Rapture Happen?

The Post-Tribulation Rapture: A Biblical Study



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Introduction: Understanding the Rapture

While popular fiction and failed predictions like Harold Camping's 2011 prophecy, William Miller's 1843-1844 predictions that resulted in "The Great Disappointment," and numerous YouTube date-setters who continue making failed predictions have sensationalized this topic, it's crucial to examine what Scripture actually teaches about the timing and nature of Christ's return

The Foundation: What We Know with Certainty

Christ's Own Words on Timing

Jesus made it unequivocally clear in Matthew 24:36: "No one knows the day or [the] hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows." This statement must be taken at face value—no human calculation can determine the exact timing of Christ's return.

The Countdown Begins: The Breaking of the Holy Covenant

While we cannot know the exact date, Scripture does provide a framework for understanding the sequence of end-time events. The Bible indicates that a specific event will trigger a countdown to Christ's return: the breaking of what Daniel calls "the holy covenant" (Daniel 9:27).

This breaking involves:

- The banning of "the sacrifice and the offering"
- The establishment of the "abomination of desolation" (Matthew 24:15)
- A public cessation of religious ceremonies

Once this covenant is broken, we can begin counting down 1,260 days (three and a half years) until Jesus' return if we understand these prophecies correctly.

The Case for Post-Tribulation Rapture

Biblical Timeline According to Jesus

In Matthew 24, Jesus provides the clearest timeline for His return when answering His disciples' question about "the sign of Your coming and the end of the age" (Matthew 24:3).

Matthew 24 is perhaps the most well known chapter concerning the 2nd coming of Christ. The disciples asked Jesus for "a sign" of His return, and Jesus generously gave them not just one but a whole list of signs. Wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, the Gospel being preached in all the world and the hearts of many growing cold are just some of the signs given in Matthew 24 that many people believe are being fulfilled in our generation.

There is one **outstanding** sign that Jesus clearly states will proceed both the tribulation and the rapture. This sign and the events following the sign are given in a very clear time sequence. It begins with verse 15 of Matthew Chapter 24.

“Therefore **when you see** the ‘**abomination of desolation**,’ spoken of by **Daniel the prophet**, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand) — Matthew 24:15 (NKJV)

So much is in this verse, plus a hint from Jesus to study the book of Daniel for further understanding of this mysterious “**abomination of desolation**” that will “**be placed**” or “**stand**” in the holy place. We will cover Daniel in the next four chapters, but if we don’t clearly understand the sequential order of events that Jesus presents here, we will not have the foundation to fully comprehend the book of Daniel.

Please note that the “abomination of desolation” stands in the holy place. We will discuss prototypes and foreshadowings of the abomination of desolation in the final chapters.

For now, we will focus on the phrase “**when you see.**”

When you see the “**abomination of desolation**” standing in the holy place, we are told what happens next in the twenty first verse.

“**For then shall be great tribulation**, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” — Matthew 24:21 (KJV)

It is as clear as it can be! Jesus is so precise in the ordering of events. **First**, the “abomination of desolation” and **then** comes the “great tribulation.”

In verses 29-31 of Matthew 24 we see that the “rapture” immediately follows next:

“**Immediately after the tribulation of those days** shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And **then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven**; and then shall all the

tribes of the earth mourn, and **they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven** with power and great glory. And He shall **send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds**, from one end of heaven to the other.” — Matthew 24:29-31

Jesus establishes this sequence:

- (1) **First**, the abomination of desolation stands in the Jewish temple, (verse 15)
- (2) **Secondly** comes the great tribulation (verse 21), and
- (3) **Finally**, immediately after the tribulation come the cataclysmic signs in the universe, and **then and only then appears the sign of the Son of man** in heaven, and the people of the earth mourn as they see Jesus coming in the clouds of heaven with power and glory. (verses 29-31))

This is immediately followed by the great sound of a trumpet, as the angels gather together His elect from the “four winds”, showing that believers will still be living and surviving in every corner of the earth right up until the Rapture. The Antichrist will be totally unsuccessful in stopping all the Christians and believers in God in this period known as the “Great Tribulation.”

The Greek word "immediately" (eutheos) in verse 29 is crucial: **"Immediately after** the anguish of those days... **then** at last, the sign that the Son of Man is coming will appear."

The 1,260-Day Period: The Great Tribulation

Scripture consistently references this three-and-a-half-year period:

In Daniel:

- Daniel 7:25: The Antichrist will "oppress the holy people... for a time, times, and half a time"
- Daniel 9:27: He confirms a covenant for one week (seven years) but breaks it in the middle

In Revelation:

- Revelation 11:2: The holy city is trampled for "42 months"
- Revelation 11:3: Two witnesses prophesy for "1,260 days"
- Revelation 12:6: The woman (representing believers) is nourished for "1,260 days"
- Revelation 12:14: She is protected "for a time, times, and half a time"

- Revelation 13:5: The beast is given authority for "forty-two months"

Note: In biblical times, a year was 360 days and a month was 30 days, making 1,260 days equal to exactly three and a half years or 42 months.

The Church Through Tribulation, Not Escape From It

Several biblical evidences support the post-tribulation view:

- 1. Jesus' Discourse Includes the Church** In Matthew 24, Jesus addresses His disciples directly, giving instructions for the tribulation period. He uses "you" when describing those who will experience these events, indicating the church's presence during tribulation.
- 2. The Purpose of Tribulation** Scripture presents tribulation as both:
 - Judgment on the world for sin
 - Refinement and purification for God's people (Daniel 12:10, Revelation 7:14)
- 3. The Visible Nature of the Rapture** Matthew 24:30-31 describes a highly visible return where "all the peoples of the earth" will see Christ coming. This contradicts the idea of a secret rapture occurring before tribulation.
- 4. Paul's Teaching in 1 Thessalonians** Paul describes the rapture as occurring with "a loud command," "the voice of the archangel," and "the trumpet call of God" (1 Thessalonians 4:16)—hardly a secret event.

Additional Biblical Support for Post-Tribulation Timing

The Resurrection Connection

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 clearly states that "the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive... will be caught up together with them." This resurrection of the righteous is consistently placed at the end of the age in Scripture (John 6:39-40, 44, 54).

The Last Trump

1 Corinthians 15:52 speaks of the resurrection occurring "at the last trump." Revelation 11:15-18 describes the seventh (last) trumpet as the time when "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord," suggesting this occurs at Christ's return to establish His earthly kingdom.

Jesus' Prayer in John 17

Christ prayed, "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15). This suggests protection through tribulation rather than removal from it.

Historical Church Teaching

The post-tribulation view was the predominant belief of the early church for centuries. The pre-tribulation rapture theory is relatively recent, popularized in the 19th century.

Addressing Common Pre-Tribulation Arguments

"The Church Isn't Mentioned in Revelation 4-18"

While the word "church" (ekklesia) isn't used, believers are clearly present:

- The "saints" in Revelation 7:9-14 who come "out of the great tribulation"
- The "saints" whom the beast wars against (Revelation 13:7)
- Those who "keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (Revelation 12:17)

"God's Wrath vs. Satan's Wrath"

Scripture distinguishes between:

- Satan's wrath against believers (Revelation 12:12, 17)
- God's wrath on unbelievers (Revelation 16:1)

The church experiences the former but is protected from the latter.

Practical Implications and Preparation

Why This Matters

Understanding the post-tribulation timeline affects how we:

- Prepare spiritually for potential persecution
- Interpret current world events
- Plan for the future as individuals and churches
- Encourage one another in difficult times

Living in Light of His Coming

Regardless of tribulation timing, Jesus calls us to:

- Be "faithful and wise servants" (Matthew 24:45-46)
- Love God and others wholeheartedly

- Share the gospel and make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20)
- Not worry about tomorrow but focus on today's responsibilities (Matthew 6:34)

The Blessed Hope

The post-tribulation view doesn't diminish the blessed hope of Christ's return. Rather, it:

- Acknowledges that following Christ may involve suffering (John 16:33)
- Emphasizes God's faithfulness to sustain His people through trials
- Highlights the ultimate victory that comes after the battle
- Prepares believers for potential persecution while maintaining hope

Conclusion: Ready for Whatever Comes

While debates about rapture timing continue, all believers can agree on these essentials:

- Christ will return visibly and gloriously
- All believers will be resurrected and glorified
- God's kingdom will be established on earth
- We should live faithfully until He comes

Jesus promised, "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Whether we face tribulation or not, His presence sustains us. Our calling remains the same: to love God, serve others, and faithfully proclaim His gospel until He comes.

The post-tribulation view calls us to spiritual preparedness for potential suffering while maintaining unwavering hope in Christ's ultimate victory. As we await His return, we can take comfort in knowing that nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:38-39) and that He who began a good work in us will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

Note from the author:

In this class, we studied verses that give credence to the belief that believers will go through the tribulation. The aim is not to "argue doctrine" or to prove which "side is right." Whether you believe in pre-tribulation rapture or not is minor compared to our obligation to "love one another as he loved us" which Jesus commanded us

to do in John Chapters 13 and 15. For way too long, many Christians have argued doctrine instead of seeking to humbly “serve one another in love,” (Galatians 5:13) and work together to build His kingdom.

In our attempts to prove our side doctrinally correct, we often hinder the fulfillment of one of Jesus’ final prayers:

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; **that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me** — John 17:20,21 NKJV

If we sought more for Christian unity and truly embraced the fascinating differences in the many branches of Christianity, we may find that more people in the “world may believe” as they see our love for each other despite our different interpretations of the Gospel.

We too often divide ourselves over minor issues instead of seeking to “have fervent charity amongst ourselves.” 1 Peter 4:8

“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” — John 13:35 NKJV

Harm has been done to the cause of Christ by people over focusing on the end time scriptures to the neglect of the major Christian principles of “loving our neighbors as ourselves,” and humbly striving for unity amongst believers.

I pray this is a blessing to you and it will motivate you to “redeem the time” by actively serving others as Jesus would have us to. Whether the Rapture comes before, during or after the Great Tribulation, it behooves us all “to work the works of him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.” (John 9:4) We have one life, and that may soon be past, only what is done for Christ and His love will last!