

## Addressing Questions from One of Our Class Members...

These Scriptures were presented along with questions regarding the Rapture/Tribulation asking, in effect, don't these Scriptures show that believers will not have to go through the Tribulation, and that the Bible promises a Rapture where believers are caught up in the air?

I've responded as best I can and after having consulted several trusted resources. Find the given Scripture passage first, in red, then my comments beneath each.

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**Revelation 3:10: Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.**

**Pastor Chris:** Dispensationalists find here a promise of a pre-Tribulation Rapture because it suggests a global-wide crisis. Since Jesus promises to keep the church from this terrible time, their line of thinking goes that the church must therefore be removed from the earth before the Tribulation of the last days. However, this passage can be interpreted in other ways.

Another interpretation would not agree that the "hour of trial" is identified with a specific period of a few years at the end of time. Even if that were the case, it's not at all clear that removing the church from the earth would be the only way Jesus could keep His people from the wars and plagues, etc. For example, Jesus prayed the following for His disciples: "I do not pray that You (Father) should take them (the disciples) out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15). The words in John 17, "keep...from," are the same Greek words used in Revelation 3 above.

Another interpretation is that the time of trial is generic. We know that all people in the world experience times of trials and there have been many spots in history where terrible wars and disease have threatened believers. Yet, we are still secure in God's care. What's more, there have been many, many times in history—not to mention things going on today—that are unspeakably horrible for believers (we Americans are currently quite isolated from these Tribulations) and God did not take them out of the world. My view is that obscenely persecuted Christians past and present would be deeply offended and confused if we were to suggest to them that God will remove His faithful followers from the earth before Tribulation.

Another interpretation is that the words "whole world" were consistently and normally used at the time of John to refer to the Roman Empire (e.g. Luke 2:1). A trial that is going to come on the "whole world" may suggest a coming crisis that will shake the whole empire and place Jews, in particular, in great danger. In 68 AD, Nero's death and the wars that followed severely threatened the stability of the Roman Empire. During the same time, Jews were in the fight of their lives for the survival of their nation against the Romans. This interpretation suggests that the judgement on Jerusalem is what is implied in the promise "I am coming quickly" (verse 11).

One final word: Much has been made about the dating of the Book of Revelation, and where someone places the date of authorship has an impact on how the book is interpreted (i.e., 68 AD versus 96 AD). I personally side with the scholars who go with the earlier dates citing internal evidence. One thing, though, is absolutely certain, one theologian says: “The book was not primarily written about events that would not transpire until hundreds or even thousands of years later. If it had been, it would be the only book of the Bible that was intentionally meant to be undecipherable to its original readers. God does not pull tricks like that on people who are undergoing intense persecution: this book could not be primarily speaking of events in our own [present] day [or in our own future].”

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Matthew 24:14-21: And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. 15 “So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’[a] spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand— 16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. 18 Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. 19 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 20 Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. 21 For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.

Pastor Chris: This passage is often cited by Dispensationalists to describe the end times. However, this passage of Scripture is not about the end times. Rather, Jesus is using some apocalyptic language (remember that this passage is sometimes called “The Little Apocalypse”) to answer directly a question that His disciples had asked, namely, “When will the Temple be destroyed?” (Jesus had just been talking about the destruction of the Temple and the disciples asked Him to elaborate). These events in fact describe the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, which did happen within the generation of those listening as Jesus plainly prophesied in verse 34 of the same chapter. The reason we know that this passage is not about the end times and comes from another separate time (though Matthew puts different encounters together in chapter 24), is by comparing it to the parallel Gospel account in Luke. Jesus here is describing the destruction of the Temple, and a careful, historical look at the brutality and horror of what actually took place in 70 AD to the inhabitants of Jerusalem helps confirm it.

Everything up to verse 35 in Matthew 24 describes the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. But what Jesus talks about after verse 35 in Matthew 24 is, indeed, about the end times. The reader should note that Jesus gives no details about timing, and there is no Tribulation or Rapture mentioned. Furthermore, a careful look at the context of Jesus’ parables in the last half of Matthew 24 and then Matthew 25 shows that, in fact, the one “taken away” is judged and condemned. In other words, in Jesus’ parables here, the one “left behind” is actually the one who is blessed and saved—the complete opposite of what Dispensationalists and the “Left Behind” books suggest.

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1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: 16 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. 17 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.

**Pastor Chris:** This is only one place in the entire Bible that says anything close to the Dispensational view of the Rapture. The Greek word for “caught up” has been translated in Latin as *rapiemur*, and that’s where we get the word “Rapture.”

Paul talks about a similar idea in 1 Corinthians 15 as well, where he writes about “a mystery:” He says that we will not all sleep (die), but we will all be changed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye, the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall rise, etc.

Those two passages, 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15, are the only two passages in the Bible that can be linked to the concept of or word “Rapture,” but neither of those places say anything at all about a Tribulation being before, during, or afterwards,

Furthermore, there is absolutely no connection in any passage of Scripture of a Rapture with a Tribulation.

What is happening in 1 Thessalonians? Paul is describing something in his own contemporary culture called a *parousia*. (That word is a secular word and later becomes a Christian word). Why did Paul use that particular word? It describes an event where a dignitary or king would return triumphantly to the city. Then, all the inhabitants go out to welcome him. The dignitary does not then return from where he came from, nor do the inhabitants go away with the dignitary.

Now, it may be that when Christ returns someday, the faithful will actually be caught up in the air to greet the Lord, but there’s nothing in this passage to suggest that we go back with Jesus into heaven. Rather, the event is a *parousia*: We welcome back our conquering King. (I talk about this in depth in two sermons: “We Belong to the King,” and the “King is Coming” found on the website). Many faithful biblical scholars interpret this passage as being more about the resurrection of the dead in Christ—that’s the gist of the “caught up” language—than being about going up in the air.

Further, there is also nothing in the passage that suggests Christ’s coming is secret (“loud command,” “trumpet,” etc.), or that there are two second comings, meaning a secret Rapture and then at some point an additional return of Christ.

Rather, there is scriptural evidence that when Jesus comes again, His second coming, then He comes back for good to reign forever. Jesus says in John 6:39, 40, 44, and 54 that He's going to raise his people up, that's His faithful believers, “on the last day.” If Jesus thought that the last

day would be followed by a seven-year Tribulation, and that the last day was not actually the last day, He surely would have said so.

Jesus also makes it clear that when He returns, the wicked will be judged, too—that is to say, those who reject his words—in John 12:48.

Then, in Matthew 25:31 Jesus says that when He comes back, He's going to call all the nations before Him, and then He's going to separate between the sheep and the goats. Again, nothing in these words from Jesus Himself would suggest a secret coming, or a return to heaven of His faithful ones, before a Tribulation that would then end with Him coming again an additional time.

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**Matthew 24:29-30:** 29 “Immediately after the distress of those days “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ 30 “Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth] will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.

**Pastor Chris:** Once again, this passage is not about the end times. Jesus is describing (prophesying) about the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. We know this is true by comparing it to the parallel account in Luke. See the other answer about passages in Matthew 24 above.

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**Revelation 19:11-16:** I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: king of kings and lord of lords.

**Pastor Chris:** Recall that Revelation is written in apocalyptic language and so, therefore, interpretations can vary widely. There are at least four (that I know of): The “Historicist” approach that sees the book as a prewritten record of the course of history from the time of John to the end of the world (fulfillment is in progress now); The “Preterist” approach, which views the fulfillment of Revelation’s prophecies as having already occurred (there is also a “Semi-preterist” view that sees the final chapters as looking forward to the second coming); The “Futurist” view that says that most of the prophecies have not yet been fulfilled and will be in the future; and what is called the “Idealist” approach that doesn’t try to find individual

fulfillments of these visions but rather takes the book to be a great drama depicting “transcendent spiritual realities.”

Some interpretations of this particular passage include that it refers to Christ returning at the second coming, or that it symbolizes the spiritual warfare of the church as Christ’s Body on earth. But none of them, so far as I can tell, include anything that would support the idea of a fixed period of Tribulation or of the Dispensational view of the Rapture.

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**Revelation 1:10: On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet,**

**Pastor Chris:** I’m not precisely sure why this passage was given. However, it might have been connected in the questioner’s mind to Revelation 4:1 which is sometimes cited by Dispensationalists as a proof text for the Rapture: (**John heard a voice like a trumpet saying, “come up and I will show you things that are to happen after this”**). The thinking goes that it shows Paul being “caught up” into heaven and therefore somehow showing the church also being Raptured. There are two primary problems with that interpretation: There's nothing in the Bible that would suggest that whatever John does, the church therefore also does. But even if that were so, then what do we do with the fact that John is back on earth again in chapter 17?